



The MENNONITE STORY

by Rudy Baergen



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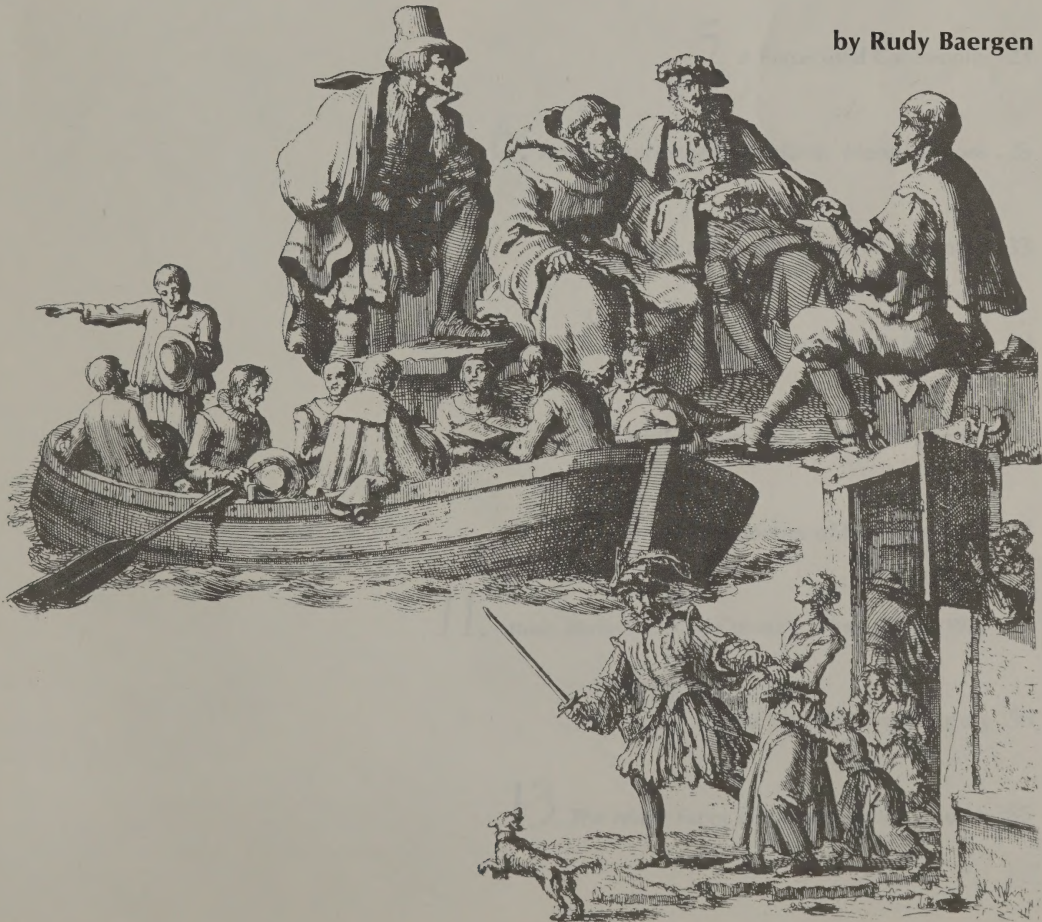
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by Rudy Baugman



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3 The Reformation

Although Mennonites have become known as an ethnic group like the Italians or the Ukrainians, at the heart of the Mennonite roots is a faith.



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1.

Your Mennonite Church

Thinking about our history

History is the coming together of many personal life stories. Naturally some stories intertwine more than others, perhaps simply because of their proximity to each other, but also because they already have a common story in their heritage. Today one can read and study about many of the stories of a people. Alex Haley's popular book *Roots* and the movie based on it are an excellent example of how one black person's story can be traced back to its roots in Africa. The Jewish people have also long been aware of the depth and challenge in their people's story. The Old Testament is actually the story of how God became known to the Hebrew people.

Mennonites also have a rich and intriguing story. It too takes us to other continents. While it is the story of a people, it is perhaps more accurately the story of a particular kind of Christian faith. Although Mennonites have become known as an ethnic group like the Italians or the Ukrainians, at the heart of the Mennonite roots is a faith, like the Lutheran or the Baptist faith, and there are many ethnic, national, and cultural Mennonite heritages. Mennonite history is more than borscht and Low German. Mennonite history is the story of how religious ideas have affected people and events.

Why should one study Mennonite history? Many reasons can be given. First, it is an interesting story filled with all the themes and action that make a good drama. The perseverance in the face of severe persecution in the early movement, the times of tension and division within the movement later on, and the events of terror and famine in Russia compare well to any history for interest's sake alone.

Second, it is good for us to study Mennonite history because becoming aware of the stories of grandparents and their grandparents gives us a sense of stability to face our own times. Some of our forebears faced situations as difficult as any we will ever have to face. Knowing how they dealt with them can give us a sense of assurance and strength

and help us to know which direction to go in our time of rapid change and turmoil.

Third, those of us who are members or children of members in the Mennonite church should know about our church's story because it is part of us and we are part of it. The Mennonite/Anabaptist forebears are our spiritual and often biological ancestors. Many of us, in turn, will take our place in this ongoing story. Knowledge of Mennonite history may better help us to understand our present church, our parents and grandparents, and ultimately ourselves.

Fourth, we should become aware of our church's story because it is the story of how people have sought to live out their faith in God. Sometimes they have been obedient to God's will, and sometimes they have failed miserably. Throughout, God has made himself known. We can learn something about God and his work in our lives by observing what he has done in the lives of our forebears.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you know when and how your local Mennonite church began?
2. What does being a Mennonite mean to members of your church?

Start from where you are

A common procedure for studying history is to begin at the beginning and move through the events in a chronological fashion. One thing leads to another in a step-by-step fashion. However, sometimes it is helpful to begin by considering the ending of the story. Let us concentrate now on our own time and ask how we are connected to the story that we will be looking at in the next sessions.

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What does it mean to be Mennonite? What are some of the unique aspects of the Mennonite church? How is the Mennonite church different from churches such as the Roman Catholic or Lutheran churches? Contrast your Mennonite worship service with the following description of a Roman Catholic service:

The Mass begins at 11:00 a.m. Parents with their children, single people, and older people have for the last fifteen minutes filed into the little Roman Catholic church. As they enter the sanctuary they pause to dip their fingers into the holy water at the door and symbolically cleanse themselves. Water was a symbol that Jesus treasured, and the symbol has lived on in the Catholic church. The worshipers move into the sanctuary towards a pew, but before they turn to sit down, many will bless themselves in some fashion before the image of Jesus on the cross at the front of the church. Some simply bow their heads, some curtsy, some cross themselves, some touch the floor with their right knee. Quietly they move into the pew and spend a few minutes in prayer and meditation, either by simply being seated or by kneeling and bowing their head. Then they sit back and allow the atmosphere of the church to penetrate their minds and their hearts. At the front of the church is the altar from which the mass will be conducted; beside it there is a beckoning, inviting statue of Jesus and a few sculptures of the apostles. On the walls of the sanctuary are the Fourteen Stations of the Cross—the pictorial story of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Soon the priest comes in from the back. The congregation rises and sings the antiphony, "Sing a new song to the Lord! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Truth and beauty surround him, he lives in holiness and glory." The priest gives the greeting, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The congregation responds, "And also with you." It is announced that today's theme is trusting in God. This is in preparation of the Lenten season which will begin on Ash Wednesday. Meanwhile the altar assistants have entered, carrying a cross and several candles. Today the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides are assistants for the service.

The liturgy of the Mass is under way and moves steadily toward the climax of the service, the communion. It begins with the Penitential Rite when the congregation prays:

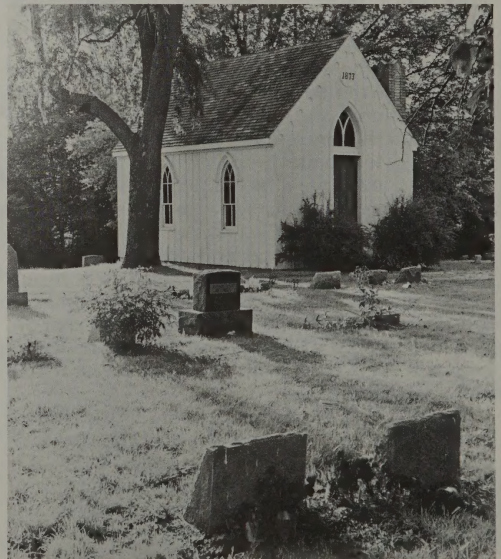
I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done,
and in what I have failed to do;
and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,

all the angels and saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

The priest responds, "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us everlasting life," and leads the congregation in a penitential invocation.

After the prayers of cleansing and praise, the Mass continues with the Liturgy of the Word. Today a portion from Jeremiah and 1 Corinthians is read by one of the scouts. The priest reads the gospel passage from Luke 6:17, 20-26 and comments on how Jesus calls us to trust in God. After the congregation is seated, the homily (sermon) continues. The priest admits that sometimes it is difficult to make the admonition "Trust in God" meaningful. Too often it remains a pious, noble, but abstract platitude. The priest suggests three concrete ways of giving oneself in trust. One should take seriously the church liturgical calendar and give oneself to the mood and soul-searching of Lent; one should take seriously the Scripture readings that the church has selected. They are chosen for a purpose and can speak to our needs. Thirdly, one should allow his senses to help him understand the mystery of Christ. The church uses many instruments to help in understanding that mystery, and we need to allow our senses to appreciate those aids.

Do you know when and how your local Mennonite church began?



Karl Wenger

One organization that has allowed the various groups of Mennonites to work side by side at some of the basic values emphasized throughout the history of the Mennonite church is the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Through MCC Mennonites serve the people of the world in the name of Christ.



Willard H. Walther

The liturgy proceeds with a profession of faith and prayers of intercession and soon comes to the climax of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. While the offering is being collected, the elements are prepared for communion. The congregation stands for the priest's prayer, "Father, may we celebrate the Eucharist with reverence and love, for when we proclaim the death of the Lord you continue the work of his redemption, who is Lord for ever and ever." The Eucharistic prayer is said responsively and ends in the acclamation: "Keep in mind that Jesus Christ has died for us and is risen from the dead. He is our saving Lord, he is joy for all ages."

After the Lord's Prayer has been sung, the congregation celebrates the Rite of Peace. The priest says, "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever." The congregation expresses wishes of peace and love toward one another. After the breaking of the bread the congregation utters, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word and I shall be healed." The priest holds up the bread and wine and says of the bread, "The body of Christ," and of the wine, "The blood of Christ." (A bell rings to indicate the transformation in substance.) The congregation rises and files forward to receive the bread which has been dipped in the wine. The priest places a wafer on the tongue of each worshipper and gives a blessing. A time of silence follows. After a few announcements and a short prayer, the congregation receives the closing blessing, "Go in the peace of Christ. The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord." The solemn murmur, "Thanks be to God," ends the drama. The individuals quietly slip out of the sanctuary to the accompaniment of recessional music.

Questions for discussion:

1. What things strike you about the Roman Catholic Mass?
2. What are some of the differences between the Mennonite church and some of the other Christian denominations that you are familiar with?
3. What do you think it means to be a Mennonite?

The present Mennonite church

In the world today there are over 600,000 Mennonites, scattered over forty different coun-

tries. There are Mennonites in Africa, Asia, Australia, Central and South America, Europe, Russia, and North America. Of the 300,000 in North America, the largest number belong to the Mennonite Church, with a membership of over 106,500. The General Conference Mennonite Church has a membership of over 60,400, and the Mennonite Brethren membership is over 35,000.

There is a great deal of diversity among the 300,000 Mennonites of North America today, but there is also much that these Mennonites have in common. An extensive study done in 1975 brought to light some interesting information about Mennonites four hundred years after the inception of their movement. The following were some of the discoveries:

—About one-third of North American Mennonites live on farms, and another third live in rural but nonfarm places; the remaining are urban;

—On the average Mennonites are about equal with the general population in education;

—In their professions Mennonites are represented in many careers and vocations;

—The economic level of the Mennonites on the average is slightly higher than the national average;

—The median age for baptism has gone down in the Mennonite church in the last years with the Mennonite Church having a median age of 14 years, the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren having 16.4 as an average age;

—From 60 to 80 percent of the Mennonites surveyed indicated that they were in agreement with Anabaptist principles;

—Regular Sunday school participation was reported by over 80 percent;

—Traditionally conservative views on women's roles in church and society prevailed among men and women;

—There was a negative correlation between measures of personal piety on the one hand and measures of social concern and social ethics on the other;

—Among those attracted to North American fundamentalism, the ties to Anabaptism weaken the most.

(Adapted from Harder and Kauffman, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1975.)

Question for discussion

What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Mennonite church today?

The Christian Church to the Reformation

The early Christian church

The Mennonite church has some unique things about it. It is different from the Catholic church, as it is from the Lutheran and other Protestant churches. On the other hand, there are many things the Mennonite church has in common with these churches. After all, the Mennonite church is part of the Christian church. How did this Christian church with all its diversity and varying interpretations begin? How did it spread?

1. The beginnings of the early church

Many of them believed [Peter's] message and were baptized; about three thousand people were added to the group that day. They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers. Many miracles and wonders were done through the apostles, which caused everyone to be filled with awe. All the believers continued together in close fellowship, and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Every day they continued to meet as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating the food with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved (Acts 2:41-47, TEV).

2. The spread of the church

In spite of the ministry of men like Philip, Peter, and John in Palestine, the future of the Christian church was not to be in Palestine. While at first the Christian church was entirely Jewish—Jesus had been a Jew, all the disciples were Jewish, the early Christians worshiped in the Temple, the first missionaries were Jewish—by the time the Gospels were being written (A.D. 60-90), the church had already moved to a predominantly Gentile base.

The rift between Christian and non-Christian Jews had widened until in A.D. 84 the Jewish leadership in Palestine sent word to the synagogues everywhere that Christian Jews were to be excluded from worship assemblies. Meanwhile, the Christian Jewish church seems to have left Jerusalem, just prior to the Roman devastation of that city in A.D. 70.

The father of the Gentile mission was the Jewish Pharisee Saul, better known as Paul. He made three major contributions to the growth of the church. First, it was under his guidance that the church was established in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. Paul engaged in three missionary journeys and established many of the early churches. Secondly, Paul paved the way for Gentiles to be accepted into the Jewish Christian church. It seems that many of the Jewish Christians believed that one first had to become a Jew before becoming a Christian, one had to accept circumcision before receiving baptism. Paul never accepted this view and was influential in bringing about a basic change in the self-identity of the early church. The third major contribution of the Apostle Paul was the letters he wrote to the various churches which came to be included in the New Testament. They have continued to provide direction and inspiration to the Christian church through the centuries.

Questions for further thought and study

1. What things strike you about the early church?
2. What do you think were some of the consequences of the gospel moving from the Jewish Palestine setting to the Greek Gentile setting?

3. The early church faces persecution

The Book of Acts in the New Testament already tells us that there was opposition to the young Christian church. A story from the early church

recounts the execution of Polycarp, a bishop appointed to the church at Smyrna by the Apostle John.

It is stated that three days before he was apprehended and sentenced to death, he was suddenly overcome by sleep, in the midst of his prayer, and while dreaming, had a vision, in which he saw the pillow on which he lay with his head, suddenly taking fire and was consumed. Instantly awakened thereby, he concluded that he was to be burnt for the name of Christ.

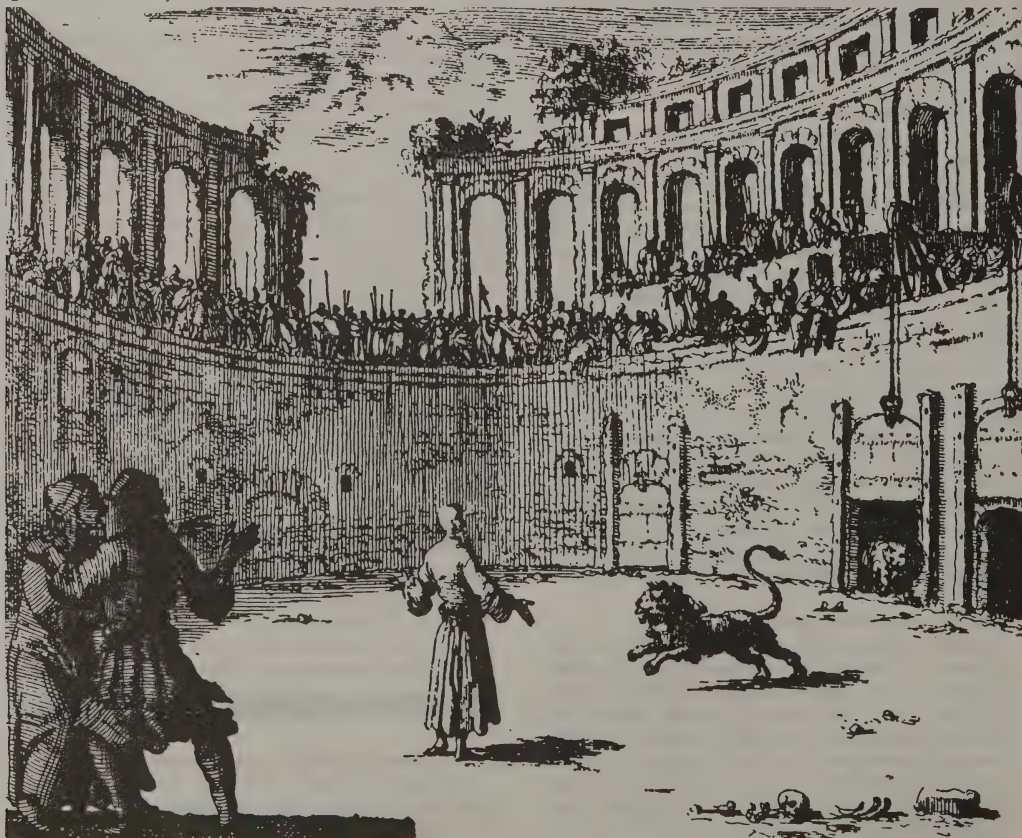
When those who sought to apprehend him, had approached very close, his friends endeavored to conceal him, and, therefore, brought him to another country-seat, where he was nevertheless shortly afterwards discovered by his

persecutors. For they had seized two lads, whom they, by scourging them, compelled to say where Polycarp was; and although, from the chamber in which he was, he might easily have made his escape into another house near by, he would not do it, but said: "The will of the Lord be done." He therefore descended the stairs, to meet his persecutors, whom he received so kindly, that those who had not known him before, regretfully said, "What need had we to make so great haste, to apprehend such an old man?"

Polycarp immediately had a table spread for his captors, and affectionately urged them to eat; begging of them to allow him an hour's time in which to pray undisturbedly in quiet, while they were eating; which they granted him. When he

10

Ignatius Devoured by Wild Beasts



had finished his prayer, and the hour was up, in which he had reflected upon his life, and commended the church of which he was teacher, unto God and his Saviour, the bailiffs placed him upon an ass, and led him to the city, on the Sabbath of the great feast. . . .

The stadtholder admonished him to have compassion for his great age, and, by swearing by the Emperor's fortune, to deny Christ. Thereupon Polycarp gave the following candid reply, "I have now served my Lord Christ Jesus eighty-six years, and He has never done me any harm, How can I deny my King, who hath hitherto preserved me from all evil, and so faithfully redeemed me?"

. . . Finally, when the people demanded his death, he was delivered by the Stadtholder to be burned. Instantly there was brought together a great heap of wood, fagots, and shavings. When Polycarp saw this, he undressed himself, and took off his shoes, in order to be laid on the wood without any clothes. This being done, the executioners were about to lay their hands on him, to nail him on the wood; but he said: "Let it be so; He that hath given me strength to endure the pain of the fire, will also strengthen me to remain still in the fire, though you nail me not to the firewood." (sic) They accordingly, did not fasten him with nails, but simply with a rope, tied his hands, behind his back. Thus prepared for a burnt offering, and placed upon the wood like a sacrificial lamb, he prayed to God, saying, "O Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son . . . I thank Thee that Thou didst call me to this day and hour, and hast counted me worthy, that I may have my part and place among the number of the holy martyrs. . . .

As soon as he had uttered the last word of his prayer . . . the executioners ignited the wood upon which he was placed. . . . (From *Martyrs' Mirror*, pp. 112-113.)

Questions for further thought and study

1. Why do you think the Christians were persecuted in the first centuries?
2. What do you think was the outcome of the persecution?

From persecution to favor

We have seen how the early Christians were persecuted by the Romans. That persecution lasted for several centuries after the birth of the church. It was finally brought to an end by the Emperor Constantine.

Constantine became emperor of the Roman Empire after a long struggle with several opponents. The emperor before him, Diocletian, thinking that the empire was too large, had parceled it into sections and given it to assistant emperors. These assistants soon began to quarrel with each other and their sons continued the feud. Constantine was the son of one of these assistant emperors. His main opponent, Maxentius, was the son of another.

One day while marching to Rome in a war against Maxentius, Constantine is said to have seen at sunset a cross of light above the sun with the words *Hoc Signo Vinctes*, which means "By this sign thou shalt conquer." Constantine saw this as an omen to take up the Christian religion. The church had gained a state of enviable power in the Roman Empire, and Constantine believed that the Christian God would serve him well in gaining a military victory. In the battle that followed, Maxentius's troops retreated too hurriedly onto a pontoon bridge across the Tiber River. The bridge collapsed and Maxentius himself was drowned. Constantine was victorious, and with this victory in A.D. 312 he had won Italy.

With Constantine in control, persecution of Christians now ended, and Christianity became the favored religion of the Empire. The Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified by the Romans now was worshiped in the Roman Empire as Savior. The church had successfully withstood the trial by fire; it was now to be tried by favor.

Some seventy years after Constantine, the reversal was completed. Christianity was now to be the only legal religion, and those who were *not* Christian were persecuted. Emperor Theodosian issued the following decree on February 27, 380:

We desire that all peoples who fall beneath the sway of our imperial clemency should profess the faith which we believe to have been communicated by the Apostle Peter to the Romans and maintained in its traditional form to the present day. . . . And we require that those who follow this rule of faith should embrace the name of Catholic (universal) Christians, adjudging all others madmen and ordering them to be designated as heretics. . . .

Question for further thought and study:

What changes do you think came about in the nature and the witness of the church because of the move from persecution to favor?

Martin Luther

The history of the church from the time of Constantine to the time of the Reformation can be divided into three eras. Immediately following Constantine and up to about the eleventh century the church experienced rapid growth and expansion. The next centuries saw the Roman Catholic church at its peak of power and virtually in control of Europe. Then, beginning in the fourteenth century, the church went into a decline.

This gradual disintegration of the medieval model where society was dominated by the one universal church was caused by a number of factors. Among them were: (a) the growth of the various nation states like France and England who jealously guarded their independence from Rome; (b) the winds of the new learning known as the Renaissance which brought new ideas and alternative ways of viewing things from the dominant church view; and (c) the flagrant corruption that plagued the Roman church from the Pope down to the rural clergy at this time. What was needed to bring these forces together and initiate a massive reformation was a forceful personality. That person was found in Martin Luther.

Martin Luther was born in 1483 to a peasant mining couple in remote Germany. Even as a lad he was very earnest and extraordinarily sensitive.

The tendency of the church of Luther's day was to emphasize the absolute majesty and holiness of God. This made a deep impression on the young Luther. God's wrath over sin seemed insurmountable, and Martin was often struck with the terror of impending judgment. A close encounter with death in July 1505 caused Luther to resolve to join a monastery to save his soul:

As (Luther) returned to school after a visit with his parents, sudden lightning struck him to earth. In that single flash he saw the denouement of the drama of existence. There was God the all-terrible, Christ the inexorable, and all the leering fiends springing from their lurking places in pond and wood that with sardonic cachinnations they might seize his shock of curly hair and bolt him into hell. It was no wonder that he cried out to his father's saint, patroness of miners, "St. Anne help me! I will become a monk." (Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*. New York: Mentor, 1950, p. 25.)

In the next years of his life Luther sought to still his soul in the confines of the monastery. He tried all the conventional methods of the devout. He lived the life of severe austerity. He would fast until he was weak. He would sleep without blankets on the cold earthen floor of his room. The severe discipline of his body, however, did not seem to

satisfy God. At least his soul found no peace in that method.

Another means, often pointed to by the church to find salvation, was through the sacraments of the church. The church had seven sacraments, special ways in which God's grace came to man. One of the most important was penance or the confession of one's sins. The belief was that if one confessed one's sins he would be forgiven. In order for the sin to be forgiven it had to be confessed. Luther confessed, often up to six hours on a single occasion. However, he never seemed to be finished. What about the secret sins? What about those he had forgotten? Luther believed that there was something more wrong in man than just a list of sins. His whole nature was corrupt. The entire man is in need of forgiveness! The penitential system dealt only with the temporary lapses. To Luther it was inadequate.

A third method that many found to be meaningful in the spiritual pilgrimage was known as mysticism. Here the goal was to become one in spirit with God by ceasing one's striving and yielding oneself to God. But for Luther this was again impossible. The gap between God and man was too great. How could the holy God accept the impure sinful man? Furthermore, God was not loveable to Luther. God, he believed, was cruel and unjust. "Love him?" he said. "I do not love him. I hate Him!"

The breakthrough for Luther came when he began teaching from the Psalms at the University of Wittenberg in 1513. While lecturing on the twenty-second Psalm and dealing with the phrase "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he was reminded that those were Jesus' words on the cross. Suddenly it struck him that Christ had identified himself so completely with man that he also had experienced estrangement from God. In the very act of judging the sinner, he had made himself one with the sinner, assuming the punishment and sharing his very guilt. For Luther, God the All Terrible now also became God the All Merciful. In the utter desolation of the forsaken Christ, God was able to reconcile the world to himself.

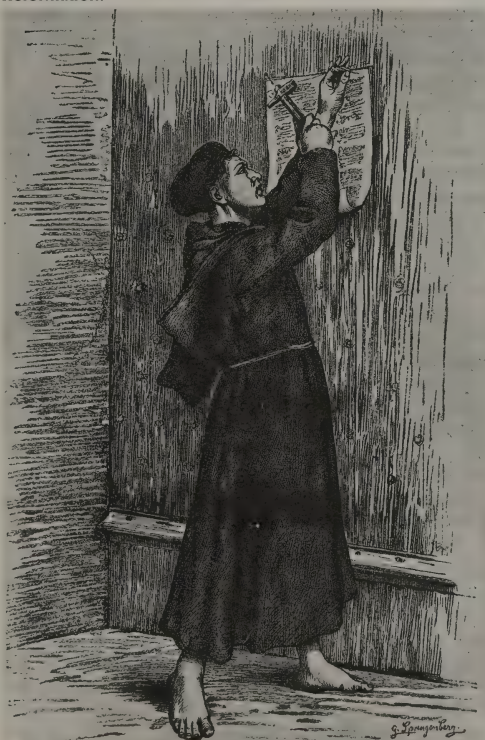
Questions for review and discussion:

1. What were the factors that brought about the Reformation?
2. Why did Luther decide to go to a monastery?
3. What were the common methods found meaningful in that day for gaining spiritual peace?
4. Explain the process by which Luther found spiritual peace.

The Reformation

Although Martin Luther succeeded in bringing reform to the church of northern Germany, there were other great reformers besides Martin Luther. In the canton of Zürich, Switzerland, Ulrich

In this Old German engraving, Martin Luther nails his ninety-five theses on the door of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. The posting of these theses is generally considered to mark the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.



Religious News Service

Zwingli, the chief of the German-speaking Swiss reformers, proclaimed his new insights on the structure and calling of the Christian church. It was from within Zwingli's reform movement that the Anabaptists, the founders of the Mennonite church, came.

13

The Lutheran Reform

In 1516 Martin Luther began to speak out against a practice of selling indulgences, a system whereby a person could have his sins forgiven through the payment of a sum of money. It was around this practical issue that the controversy that would engulf the church began.

Indulgences rested on the theory that Christ, the apostles, and the saints had accumulated a treasury of merit in heaven that was available to the less pure person. Originally indulgences were granted to those who would join a crusade against the Muslims who had occupied the Holy Land. But by the time of Martin Luther they were being used not only to remove earthly penalties imposed by the Pope, but also for the release of individuals from purgatory and for the forgiveness of all sin. While the church claimed the indulgences were granted for the remission of guilt and sins, indulgences had actually become a device for raising revenues. The income derived from the indulgences was divided evenly between the Pope and the abbot, bishop, or prince in whose domain the indulgences were conferred.

In 1517 the abuse of the indulgences system reached its peak: Albert of Hohenzollern, not old enough to be a bishop at all but already holding two bishoprics, was offered the archbishopric of Mainz if he would himself pay the installation fee. He inquired of the pope how much further he would have to pay to secure a dispensation for transgressing so many of the rules. Leo X asked 12,000 ducats for the twelve apostles. Albert offered 7,000 for the seven deadly sins. They compromised on 10,000, presumably not for the ten commandments.

Albert borrowed and paid the money. In order that he might be reimbursed, the pope permitted the proclamation of an indulgence in his territories for the term of eight years, half of the proceeds to go to Albert, the other half to the construction of the basilica of St. Peter's. Albert in his instructions to the vendors passed over his own share in the transaction and instead bemoaned the deplorable state of the bones of Peter and Paul, moldering in all weather for lack of a covering. . . . Those who assisted were promised the remission of all their sins, and, apart from any contrition on their part, the release of their friends from purgatory the minute the money clinked in the chest. (Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1952, p. 38.)

Although these indulgences were not being granted in Luther's home province of Saxony since the governor, Fredrick the Wise, did not allow it to protect his own business, many of Luther's parishioners went across the border to receive the benefits. Luther was very much opposed to this practice, and finally he decided to act. On the Eve of All Saints, the time in which Fredrick opened his collection of relics for viewing, Luther posted a statement to the door of the church made up of ninety-five propositions. This was common practice when one wanted to debate some issue.

Luther's protest against the practice of indulgence and the exploitation of the German people in general by the Pope caught on like wild fire. Initially the Pope did not take him seriously and remarked, "Luther is a drunken German. He will feel different when he is sober." However, Luther eventually had to be dealt with. Several hearings were arranged, and a number of debates were held. Although Luther was excommunicated by the Pope, he remained safe since Fredrick the Wise had become his protector. In the hopes of having Luther's name cleared, Fredrick arranged one more hearing for him before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521. At this hearing Luther was asked to take back his teaching without any qualifications. After being granted a night to think through a response, Luther attempted to defend his work. His opponents were not satisfied with his initial answer and pushed him for a clear-cut, unequivocal answer on whether or not he would recant his teachings. Finally Luther replied:

Since Your Majesty and Your Lordships ask for a plain answer, I will give you one without either horns or teeth. Unless I am shown by the Bible or reason—I do not trust in popes and councils since they have often made mistakes—unless I am shown out of the Bible, I neither can nor will take back anything. My conscience is a captive to

the Bible, and I cannot go against conscience. God help me. Amen. (Roland Bainton, *The Church of Our Fathers*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950, p. 135.)

Luther was found guilty of heresy and condemned to death. However, he had been promised safe conduct back to Saxony. Fearing for his life, his protector, Fredrick the Wise, kidnapped Luther and took him to a place of hiding where Luther stayed for the next years.

Questions for further thought and study:

1. Explain the theory behind the practice of selling indulgences.
2. Do we have anything like indulgences in our day?

Ulrich Zwingli (1485-1531)

Ulrich Zwingli's religious experience was very different from that of Martin Luther. Zwingli never passed through the same sense of sin and, finally, forgiveness as Luther did. He tended to be much more intellectual and radical than his fellow reformer, Martin Luther. And yet Zwingli was not radical enough for some of the young men who had joined his movement. These young, impatient men were eventually no longer able to work with their teacher. Out of their impatience and desire for more rapid change came the Anabaptist movement.

1. Zwingli's early life

Ulrich Zwingli is known for his work in the city of Zürich. Actually, he was born in the small village of Wildhaus in the northeastern part of the Swiss Confederation. Zwingli's family was a prosperous peasant family with a deep religious commitment. Two of Ulrich's brothers became priests, following in the footsteps of their uncle Bartholomew. Ulrich's uncle, together with his father, saw to it that Ulrich received a good education, first at home and then at several universities in Europe.

Zwingli began his career as a priest in the town of Glarus in 1506. Here he combined further studies with the responsibilities of being a rural Swiss pastor. One of his major concerns while in Glarus was ministering to the men of the town who served in military campaigns as mercenaries, soldiers paid to serve other political powers. After witnessing the massacre of young Swiss men at one battle, he was repulsed by the mercenary system and became a strong opponent of it.



It was also while he was in Glarus that his life became marred by a personal problem that was later used against him. He found himself unable to uphold his clerical vows of celibacy and to remain sexually continent. The historian Edward Peters reports that Zwingli saw his sexual appetites as often creating a problem for him and the cause of considerable remorse since his enemies were quick to take advantage of his weakness.

2. Zwingli's reforms

In 1518 Zwingli accepted the position of priest at the Grossmünster church in Zürich. There he became increasingly critical of the Roman Catholic Church and his reputation as an evangelical preacher and reformer grew.

Like Luther, he objected to the sale of indulgences and to the unmarried state of the clergy. Like Luther, he married. And, like Luther, he believed that the Catholic Church had fallen away from the pattern of the Bible and the pope had stolen the keys of Saint Peter. A Swiss cartoon showed Saint Peter wrestling with the pope to get the keys back.



Zwingli made even more of the Bible as a pattern for the Church than did Luther. The Catholic practice, which had been followed by the Lutheran, was to read only certain parts of the Bible in church each Sunday. Zwingli instead started his preaching in Zurich in the year 1519 by going through the Gospel of Matthew verse by verse from end to end. Nor did he use anyone else's translation, but had the original Greek printed by Erasmus in front of him on the pulpit and explained its meaning to the people in his own words. The discovery of America by Columbus did not cause so much excitement in Zurich. For over a thousand years parts of the Bible had not been known by the people. Now to discover again lost parts of the Word of God was

more thrilling than to find unknown parts of the earth's surface.

The Bible had been accepted by Luther as the rule for Protestants and the Church was to be brought into accord with this rule, but in carrying out the idea Zwingli went far beyond Luther, for Luther said we may do what the Bible does not forbid. Zwingli said what the Bible does not command we may not do, and on that account he gave up all images and crosses in the churches. . . . Organs in church also were given up. The Lutherans loved to sing around the organ. The Zwinglians, if they sang at all, did so without any instrument.

The greatest difference was with regard to the Lord's Supper. Luther, although he gave up the Mass of the Catholic Church, nevertheless believed that the body of Christ is with, in, and under the bread and the wine. Since Christ said of the bread, "This is my body," and of the wine, "This is my blood," his body and blood must be there, even though we cannot tell how. But Zwingli said Christ no more meant that the bread and the wine are his body than he meant to call himself a tree when he said, "I am the true vine." The bread and the wine simply stand for his body, and the Lord's Supper is a reminder of his suffering. (Roland Bainton, *The Church of Our Fathers*, copyright © Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1950, pp. 143-44. Used by permission.)

In 1522 Zwingli resigned from the Roman Catholic priesthood, thus renouncing the Roman Church's authority over him. He was immediately reinstated by the Great Council as an evangelical minister. In 1523 a debate between the Catholic and Protestant leaders was called to determine the basis of authority for reform in Zürich. The Catholic representative did not recognize the city council as a legitimate umpire and refused to debate. The council decided to reaffirm Zwingli's appointment and authorized a number of recommendations for reform presented by Zwingli. He was encouraged to continue to preach nothing but the pure word of God.

Questions for further study:

1. Discuss the difference between the Lutheran idea of the Lord's Supper and Zwingli's concept of communion.
2. What was the formula for reform used in Zürich by Zwingli?
3. Discuss Zwingli's belief that unless things are commanded in the Bible, we may not do them.

The conflict between Zwingli and his followers

We have noted some of the reforms that Ulrich Zwingli initiated in Zürich. As time went on and Zwingli recommended more and more reforms based on his study of the Bible, the council began to hold back. Often they agreed with the recommendation in theory but because of other considerations they refused to administer the reform. For example, Zwingli had taught that the taking of interest on debts was contrary to the Bible. Naturally, the peasants immediately sought exemption from the payment of their taxes. The council, however, would not hear of this reform and tax payment continued.

It was the issue of the celebration of the Mass which brought the growing tensions in the city of Zürich to a head. Ulrich Zwingli had already gained permission to replace the Roman Catholic mass with an evangelical communion. In the summer of 1523 he began to spell out exactly how the traditional mass should be changed. It should no longer be in any sense a sacrifice of Christ on the altar, as in the Roman Catholic tradition, but should be a remembrance of Christ. Zwingli had by this time gathered around him a number of more radical followers who were anxious to see further changes in the Mass, and so in October 1523 a debate on this topic was held. The council and the people accepted Zwingli's arguments about the need for a change from the Mass to the Lord's Supper, but the council was not prepared to implement the reform at this time. It was afraid that such a radical change would anger the neighboring Roman Catholic cantons who might see this as sacrilegious. This would hurt the economic and political relations that Zürich had with these provinces and might even lead to war. That consideration was more important, the council reasoned, than the question of whether or not the Mass was being performed in accordance to how Zwingli interpreted Scripture.

When the council said no, Zwingli was prepared to wait. His young, more radical followers, however, were dissatisfied with the increasing number of compromises that Zwingli was making. The record of the October debate indicates that this dissatisfaction began to be directed at their leader, Ulrich Zwingli:

Conrad Grebel rose and thought that the priests should be given instruction, since they were all present, as to what should be done about the Mass; (the disputation) would be in vain, if something were not done about the Mass. . . .

Zwingli: My Lords (the Council) will decide how

to proceed henceforth with the Mass.

Simon Stumpf: Master Ulrich: You have no authority to place the decision in the hands of My Lords, for the decision is already made; the Spirit of God decides.

Zwingli: That is right. I shall likewise preach and act against if they decide otherwise. I do not place the decision in their hands. Nor shall I pass judgement on the Word of God. . . . This convocation did not have the purpose of deciding for or against the Word of God, but to ascertain from Scripture whether the Mass is a sacrifice or not. Hereafter they will deliberate as to the way in which that may be done most appropriately and without disturbance.

Although Zwingli here indicated he would patiently wait for the Council to implement the reform, by December he too was impatient. He indicated that he would go ahead with a reformed Lord's Supper on Christmas day of that year in his own congregation. The council, however, refused to allow him to proceed, and Zwingli once again withdrew his threat to go ahead on his own. Zwingli was now forced to accept fully the delay imposed by the council in order to maintain the working relationship with the city council.

Meanwhile Zwingli's followers had come to realize that they were now in opposition to their teacher. They were unable to accept Zwingli's reform method which said that reform would move no faster than what the state was willing to administer. They believed strongly that the Scripture should be the only authority for the Christian church. They looked at Zwingli with suspicion when he gave the council this final authority. The conflict in 1523 over the Lord's Supper was an omen of things to come.

Questions for further thought and study:

1. What was at the heart of the conflict between Zwingli and some of his followers?
2. What was there (and still is) about the Anabaptist position which was so radical?
3. If you had been there, which side do you think you would have been on?



Felix Manz



Georg Blaurock



Conrad Grebel

The Beginnings of Anabaptism

In the last lesson we became familiar with the reforms of Ulrich Zwingli. We noted that he had gathered around him a number of young radicals, very much interested in the reform of the church. We also saw that as the reform went on, these followers came to be quite critical of Zwingli's methods, believing them to be far too slow. In this lesson we will consider the formation of the Anabaptist movement.

Besides becoming familiar with some of the historical facts surrounding the beginning of Anabaptism, this lesson will introduce you to two of the basic understandings of the early Anabaptists which are important to the understanding of Mennonite history. These concepts are the Anabaptist understanding of what the church is, and secondly, the place of baptism in it. In both of these, the Anabaptists were revolutionary in their day. Their new vision of baptism and definition of the church separated them from over one thousand years of church history. It became the ultimate point of conflict between Zwingli and his radical followers.

Zwingli's radical followers

1. Conrad Grebel (1498-1526)

One of the men who had become an intimate friend of Ulrich Zwingli was Conrad Grebel.

Conrad Grebel was born to a wealthy, well-established family in the city of Zürich. His father, like many of his forefathers, was a member of the city council. Grebel was given the opportunity for a good education in the universities of Europe.

Education, it seems, was not Conrad's primary concern in these early years. Three of these years were spent at the University of Vienna, in a city known for its beauty, wealth, and sensual pleasures. The students of the university were caught up in the lavishness of life, freely indulging in drunkenness and prostitution. Brawls among the students were common, and university authorities seemed unable to discipline their students. Conrad seems to have been very much a part of this free-wheeling

lifestyle. He almost lost his hand in a student brawl. He seems to have suffered morally and spiritually from the life that he lived.

From the University of Vienna, Grebel went to the University of Paris. Here, however, he was dismissed after only three months because of his involvement in a brawl in which two Frenchmen were killed. His father now cut off his allowance, and Conrad returned home to Zürich in 1520. He had already met Zwingli in 1517, and he now began to study the Hebrew and Greek languages under him.

The year 1522 was an important one for Conrad Grebel. That year he became married, in spite of his family's ill feelings toward his bride. He and his wife lived with his parents, and Conrad reports that the tension was almost unbearable. Conrad had no money and no regular work. His mother was irreconcilable, and his father seemed to have abandoned him and was not willing to carry out the financial agreement entered into at the time of Conrad's marriage. The situation was very difficult for the new family, and Conrad's letters are filled with complaining.

Suddenly in 1523 we sense a new Conrad behind the many letters that he wrote. The biographer H. S. Bender describes the change:

The outward circumstances, as described above, remained much the same as before, poverty, poor health, conflict in the family, no secure position in life—but now it is an altogether different man who faces the outward circumstances of life. Now, instead of pouring out a doleful and despairing complaint in his letters, Conrad speaks of trust in God and of a desire to learn wisdom and patience. He stands as a man and manfully bears his burdens. No longer is life for him a dark road, it is a battleground. Courageously and hopefully he goes about the round of his daily life. How is this new attitude toward life to be explained?

The answer is that a change has come about in the inner life of Conrad Grebel; it may well be

called a conversion. An entirely new tone rings in the letters which reappear in June, 1523, after a nine months' silence. The new tone is that of a believing Christian. (Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel: 1498-1526*. Goshen, Ind.: The Mennonite Historical Society, pp. 76-77.)

2. Georg Blaurock (1491-1529)

One of the most zealous of the dissenters from Zwingli was a tall, powerful figure with fiery eyes, nicknamed "Strong George" because of the quality of his faith. "Blaurock" was actually also a nickname which he got because of the blue coat (*blau Rock*) which he commonly wore. Blaurock was a Roman Catholic priest before he joined Zwingli's group. In later years Zwingli accused Blaurock of being a fool who counted no one a child of God unless he was a madman like himself.

After the birth of the Anabaptist movement Blaurock, together with Grebel and Felix Manz, a co-worker with Grebel, traveled from house to house and congregation to congregation, baptizing and administering communion. Blaurock was especially noted for his zeal. On one of his visits to a church in Zollikon he stopped the minister on his way to the pulpit and asked him what he was going to do there. The preacher replied that he would "preach the Word of God." Blaurock replied, "Not you but I am sent to preach," and was only restrained from preaching the sermon by a bailiff present in the congregation.

3. Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528)

Perhaps the most educated and the most brilliant of the men influenced by Zwingli was Balthasar Hubmaier. Hubmaier was a Roman Catholic priest of peasant background who had received a doctor's degree in theology. Some four years before he came to the town of Waldshut, near Zürich, as the Roman Catholic priest, he had been thinking about issues raised by Luther. In 1522 he dedicated himself to the study of Luther's reformation ideas. Next year he made contact with Zwingli. He became a good friend of Zwingli and was considerably influenced by him.

Hubmaier soon found himself torn between Zwingli and the more radical reformers in Zürich. He tried to be a reconciling force and a mediator between the two factions. However, when the decisive split between Zwingli and Grebel came, Hubmaier felt it necessary to break with Zwingli, and he put the total weight of his intellect behind the Anabaptist cause. Hubmaier is especially known for his logical and persuasive articles on adult baptism.

Question for further thought and study:

What are some of the common characteristics of these followers of Zwingli?

The birth of Anabaptism

1. Zürich

Two new thoughts were born in Zurich in 1523-24; a new vision of the church and a new understanding of the state. How did these ideas take concrete form? Grebel's wife gave birth to a son in the fall of 1524. Grebel refused to have the child baptized; an infant has no faith, and faith must precede baptism. Others of Grebel's friends also refused, in the same period, to bring their newborn children for baptism. Infant baptism was at that time not only a churchly practice, but also a civil obligation. The collision between Grebel and his companions on the one hand, and the city-state of Zurich on the other, was immediate.

To clear up the difference of opinion the council arranged for a discussion between the advocates and the opponents of infant baptism. A public debate took place on January 17, 1525. According to the judgment of the council before which the debate was held, Grebel and his companions were defeated by Zwingli. The council's decisions were made accordingly on the evening of the same day. All parents who had neglected to have their children baptized were to do so within a week, on pain of banishment. Grebel and Manz were silenced, and four of their friends, Wilhelm Reublin, Ludwig Hatzler, Johannes Brotli, and Andreas Castelberg, were banished. The government hoped thus to be able to extinguish the spark.

What should the condemned group do? Should they abandon their plans? They said to themselves, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and met secretly on the evening of January 21, apparently in the home of Felix Manz' mother in the Neugasse near the Grossmünster. In this meeting Grebel baptized Georg Blaurock, whereupon Blaurock baptized several of the others present. That was the birth of Anabaptism, the earliest free church. Grebel and his companions considered the baptism which they had received as infants to be invalid, and formed a congregation of those who had become Christians through belief and baptism.

The newly baptized friends withdrew from Zurich to the nearby village of Zollikon. Here



This 19th-century painting by Reinhard shows the simplicity of the dress of the early Swiss Anabaptists in contrast to the clothes of kings and nobility who dressed luxuriously and conspicuously.

Brotli, who for some time had been living in the village as vicar, had spread the group's ideas among the people. In this village the first Anabaptist congregation came into being in late January 1525. From house to house the villagers celebrated the Lord's Supper in apostolic simplicity. In the cottages the farmers read the words of institution and shared the bread and wine. Such a celebration of communion was a revolution. (Fritz Blanke, "Anabaptism and the Reformation," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Herschberger. Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957, pp. 61-62. Used by permission.)

2. Waldshut

Meanwhile, in Hubmaier's town of Waldshut the revolution was also under way. On Easter Day of 1525 and for three days following, Hubmaier baptized three hundred adults using water from a milk pail which had been placed on the baptismal font of the church. Hubmaier himself had been baptized by Wilhelm Reublin only the day before. In this dramatic fashion Anabaptism came to the town of Waldshut.

3. Pilgram Marbeck in South Germany

On yet another front, in South Germany, another Anabaptist leader was making a contribution that ranks in importance with the ones made by Menno Simons and Conrad Grebel. Pilgram Marbeck (1495-1556) was born in the city of Rattenberg, and after receiving a good education, became a mining magistrate. The position of mining magistrate was a rare, responsible one, there being only about six such positions in Europe. The mining magistrate was required to administer the laws regulating mining in his region.

However Marbeck became an Anabaptist and was baptized in 1527. Early in 1528 he gave up his position of importance as a magistrate and the wealth and security that went with it because he was required to assist the authorities in apprehending Anabaptists. Marbeck was now forced to leave Rattenberg. He took up a public position in the city of Strassburg where he was able to engineer the building of a water system for the city. He also found a means by which lumber could be floated to Strassburg from the Black Forest. Eventually he was expelled from Strassburg because he opposed infant baptism and taught against taking an oath of allegiance to the city.

From 1532 to 1544 little is known about Marbeck's movements, but in 1544 he settled in Augsburg, once again employed as a civil servant. Meanwhile, he had continued to be one of the Anabaptists' most capable theologians. He was highly honored by his fellow Anabaptists and respected by his opponents. He made a significant contribution in the struggle of the young movement to build an identity, separate from the rest of Protestantism, based on Scripture.

Questions for review and discussion:

1. What were the new thoughts born in Zürich, and how did they come about?
2. What is meant by saying that infant baptism was a civil obligation?
3. What was the outcome of the January 1525 debate?
4. Visualize the scene in the home of Felix Manz after the debate. What might have been some of the concerns raised? What might have been some of the emotions felt? Is it significant that the first baptism performed by Grebel was by someone who was not ordained as a minister?
5. What was the new method of celebrating communion in Zollikon?
6. What contribution did Pilgram Marbeck make to the new movement?

Adult baptism and a new concept of the church

It is apparent from the readings we have done that from the beginning of the Anabaptist movement a new understanding of baptism played a crucial role. The shift from infant baptism to adult baptism became the focus of the disagreement between the Anabaptists and the rest of the Protestants. In actuality, however, baptism was only the tip of the iceberg.

22

1. A free church

In September 1524, before the administration of the first "rebaptism," Conrad Grebel wrote a letter to Thomas Muntzer in Thuringia, in the name of his circle of friends in Zurich. In this letter the causes for the separation from Zwingli were set forth. Grebel's thought is as follows: Zwingli put the Bible into our hands and encouraged us, even though we were not theologians, to study it. We have followed his advice, and in reading the New Testament we have found in one respect another teaching than that which Zwingli had given us. We have discovered another view of the church. In Zurich, as in the rest of the Christian world, every newborn child is baptized and is henceforth considered as a church member; as a result, church and people are identical, the church is everybody's church. But in the New Testament (Matt. 7:14) the church is a fellowship, not of the many, but of the few who truly believe and who live aright.

This was Grebel's new understanding of the church. Zwingli knew only the Volkskirche, and accepted it. How shall we designate what Grebel and his friends had discovered? They wanted a church free from the guardianship of the state, accepting such members as joined out of an uncoerced decision. They sought a free church in the double sense: a congregation free from the state and based upon voluntary membership. This was the first goal of Anabaptism. Their real interest was not in baptism, but in the church. They sought a fellowship of those who by God's grace had come to faith, who desired earnestly to be Christians and to testify to the Gospel in word and work. The baptism of believers was simply the most striking external manifestation of this new kind of church. Because of this external peculiarity, Zwingli named Grebel and his fellows "Rebaptizers," an epithet which stuck to the movement as a whole. The "Anabaptists" themselves refused this name; they called themselves, according to primitive Christian

practice, brethren and sisters. (Blanke, "Anabaptism and the Reformation," pp. 59-60.)

2. Discipleship

Voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship was the absolutely essential heart of this concept. This vision stands in sharp contrast to the church concept of the Reformers who retained the medieval idea of a mass church with membership of the entire population from birth to the grave compulsory by law and force.

It is from the standpoint of this new conception of the church that the Anabaptist opposition to infant baptism must be interpreted. Infant baptism was not the cause of their disavowal of the state church; it was only a symbol of the cause. How could infants give a commitment based upon a knowledge of what true Christianity means? They might conceivably passively experience the grace of God (though Anabaptists would question this), but they could not respond in pledging their lives to Christ. Such infant baptism would not only be meaningless, but would in fact become a serious obstacle to a true understanding of the nature of Christianity and membership in the church. Only adult baptism could signify an intelligent life commitment. (H. S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, pp. 47-48.)

Questions for review and discussion:

1. How did Zwingli's and Grebel's view of the church differ?
2. Explain the statement: "Infant baptism was not the cause of their disavowal of the state church; it was only a symbol of the cause."
3. Can you find a statement which gives an Anabaptist definition of the church? Put it into your own words.
4. From the Anabaptist point of view, would it have made sense to be baptized but not become a member of the church?

A Persecuted Community

We have noted that already in January 1525 those who practiced adult baptism faced banishment. In the next years persecution set in on the Anabaptists in full force.

Martyrdom of the Anabaptist leaders

On January 18, 1525, the city council of Zürich announced a threat of banishment to all those who refused the baptism of their children. On January 21, Conrad Grebel, Georg Blaurock, and Felix Manz had the right of public speech taken from them. January 30 saw the first arrest of Anabaptists when Blaurock and Manz, together with twenty-five men from Zollikon, were put into prison. The charge against Manz and Blaurock was that they had rebaptized people in spite of the decree of the Zürich council. After a short time in prison all were released except the leaders, and they were able to escape.

Felix Manz (1492-1527), a co-leader of the Anabaptists, together with Conrad Grebel, had joined Zwingli in 1522. As the son of a Roman Catholic priest Manz had received a good education and was especially known as a good scholar of the Hebrew language. Because he was instrumental in the beginning of the new Anabaptist movement, and in its leadership, he was the first to be executed at the hands of the Zürich Protestants. On January 5, 1527, with his hands and feet tied, Manz was taken to the middle of the Limmat River and given one more opportunity to give up the Anabaptist faith. When he refused, he was thrown overboard. He uttered his last prayer, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my soul," as he sank beneath the dark waves. Meanwhile, his mother and brother had run along the shore and shouted encouragement to him to remain true to his convictions.

Balthaser Hubmaier was captured in 1527 and for the last months of that year and until March 1528 was held prisoner, first in Vienna, and then at the Kreuzenstein castle. There he experienced the customary torture and cross-examination. Although Hubmaier was willing to compromise on

Instruments used to torture Anabaptists in the 16th century and beyond.



some points, he remained firm in his view of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He was eventually condemned to death for heresy and treason and burned at the stake on March 10, 1528, before a large crowd of spectators. As an act of mercy, gun powder was rubbed into his hair and beard. It would explode and bring a quicker death as well as provide sadistic enjoyment to certain spectators. Hubmaier's wife stood in the crowd and faithfully urged him to remain true to his confession. She was drowned a few days later.

The persecution of the leadership was severe. By 1530 most of the original leaders were dead.

Question for further thought and study:

What effect on Anabaptism did the severe persecution of its leaders have?

The Schleithem Confession

The scattering and persecution soon convinced some of the leaders of the need to gather and draw up a statement of common beliefs. The new Anabaptist movement was threatened with extinction, and the Schleithem Conference, also known as the Martyrs' Synod, was called to deal with this threat. The result of the conference was the Schleithem Confession, a document made up of seven points. Michael Sattler, a former monk, was probably the key person behind the document.

The Schleithem Confession

1. Baptism: Only they who genuinely repent of their sins and who want to begin a new life in the Lord Jesus will be baptized at their own request.
2. Excommunication: If a brother or a sister has fallen into error and sin and does not improve after admonition by the elders of the congregation, he or she will be expelled from the congregation according to the command of Christ (Matt. 18).
3. Breaking of bread: All who wish to break bread in remembrance of Christ's body, and all who wish to drink from a cup in remembrance of Christ's blood are united by baptism into one body, namely God's congregation, of which Christ is the Head.
4. Separation from the world: The Christians must remain separate from all the evil and sin which Satan has planted in the world. The commandment of the Lord is to be separated from the evil

one. The Christian is to remain separate from all which has not been united with God.

5. Shepherds in the church: The shepherds of the church shall be men of good reputation. They shall admonish, teach, and help everybody to lead a good life. They are elected by the congregation; should any one of them be driven away, thrown into prison, or killed, a new minister shall immediately be elected to take his place.
6. The sword: The worldly government may use the sword; the perfect congregation of Christ uses the ban, which does not inflict bodily suffering on anybody. Christ suffered and gave us an example which we are to follow. The Christian should, moreover, take no part in the worldly regime, for the laws of the worldly government are of the flesh, whereas Christ's government is of the spirit, and the weapons of the world are of the flesh while the weapons of the Christian are of the spirit, in order to overcome the world and Satan.
7. The Oath: Christ, who taught the perfect law, forbade his disciples the oath. From his example we learn that all swearing of oaths is forbidden. Your speech should be yea, yea and nay, nay; what is more than that comes of evil.

Questions for thought and discussion:

1. What points strike you as unusual?
2. Do some things seem to be missing in this confession?
3. Would your Mennonite church still agree to the Schleithem Confession?
4. Which points would you affirm, and which would you have some difficulties with?

The martyrdom of Michael Sattler

The Schleithem Conference is often known as the Martyrs' Synod because soon after it took place a number of Anabaptists, including Michael Sattler, were arrested, mercilessly interrogated and put to death. The following is the way the Martyrs' Mirror describes the trial and death of Michael Sattler:

Michael Sattler, A.D. 1527

After a long trial on the day of his departure from this world, the articles being many, Michael Sattler requested that they should be read to him again and that he should have another hearing. This the bailiff, as the governor of his lord,

opposed and would not consent to it. Michael Sattler then requested permission to speak. After a consultation, the judges returned as their answer, that if his opponents would allow it, they (the judges) would consent. Thereupon the town clerk of Ensishheim, as the attorney of said Governor spoke thus: "Prudent, honorable and wise Sirs, He has boasted of the Holy Ghost. Now, if his boast is true, it seems to me, it is unnecessary to grant him this; for if he has the Holy Ghost, as he boasts, the same will tell him what has been done here." To this Michael Sattler replied: "Ye servants of God, I hope my request will not be denied; for said articles are as yet unknown to me." The town clerk responded: "Prudent, honorable and wise Sirs, Though we are not bound to do this, yet in order to give satisfaction, we will grant him his request that it may not be thought that injustice is done him in his heresy, or that we desire to wrong him; hence let the articles be read to him."

Articles or Charges Against Michael Sattler

First, that he and his adherents have acted contrary to the mandate of the Emperor. Secondly, he has taught, held and believed that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the sacrament. Thirdly, he has taught and believed that infant baptism does not conduce to salvation. Fourthly, they have rejected the sacrament of extreme unction. Fifthly, they have despised and condemned the mother of God and the saints. Sixthly, he has declared that men are not to swear before the authorities. Seventhly, he has commenced a new and unheard of custom in regard to the Lord's Supper, placing the bread and wine on a plate, and eating and drinking the same. Eighthly, he has left the order, and married a wife. Ninthly, he has said that if the Turks should invade the country, no resistance ought to be offered them. . . .

Upon this speech the judges laughed and put their heads together, and the town clerk of Ensishheim said: "O you infamous, desperate villain and monk, shall we dispute with you? The hangman shall dispute with you, I assure you." Michael said: "God's will be done." The town clerk said: "It were well if you had never been born." Michael replied: "God knows what is good." Town clerk: "You arch-heretic, you have seduced the pious; if they would only now forsake their error, and accept grace."

Michael: "Grace is with God alone."

One of the prisoners also said: "We must not depart from the truth."

Town clerk: "You desperate villain and arch-heretic, I tell you if there were no hangman here, I would hang you myself, and think that I had done God service."

Michael: "God will judge aright."

Thereupon the town clerk said a few words to him in Latin, what we do not know.

Michael Sattler answered him Judica.

The town clerk then admonished the judges and said: "He will not cease from this talk today; therefore my Lord Judge, proceed with the sentence; I will commit it to the law."

The judge asked Michael Sattler whether he also committed it to the law.

He replied: "Ye ministers of God, I am not sent to judge the Word of God; we are sent to bear witness of it, and, hence, cannot consent to any law, since we have no command from God concerning it; but if we can not be discharged from the law, we are ready to suffer for the Word of God whatever sufferings are, or may be imposed upon us all for the sake of the faith in Christ Jesus our Saviour, as long as we have breath within us; unless we be dissuaded from it by the Scriptures."

The town clerk said: "The hangman shall convince you; he shall dispute with you, arch-heretic."

Michael: "I appeal to the Scriptures."

Then the judges arose, and went into another room, where they remained for an hour and a half, and determined on the sentence. Matt. 6:10; John 16:2; 1 Cor. 4:5; John 1:8; Job 27:3; Acts 25:11.

In the meantime, some in the room treated Michael Sattler most unmercifully, heaping reproach upon him. One of them said: "What have you in expectation for yourself and the others, that you have so seduced them?" With this, he also drew forth a sword which lay upon the table, saying: "See, with this shall they dispute with thee." But Michael did not answer upon a single word concerning his person, but willingly endured it all. One of the prisoners said: "We must not cast pearls before swine" Matt. 27:14; 7:6.

Being also asked, why he had not remained a lord in the convent, Michael answered: "According to the flesh I was a lord; but it is better so." He did not say more than what is recorded here, and this he spoke fearlessly.

The judges having returned to the room, the sentence was read. It was as follows: "In the case of the Governor of his Imperial Majesty versus Michael Sattler, judgment is passed, that Michael Sattler shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution, and cut out his tongue; then throw him upon a wagon, and there tear his body twice with red hot tongs; and after he has been brought without the gate, he shall be pinched five times in the same manner."

After this had been done in the manner prescribed, he was burned to ashes as a heretic. His fellow brethren were executed with the sword, and the sisters drowned. His wife, also, after being subjected to many entreaties, admonitions and threats, under which she remained very steadfast, was drowned a few days afterwards. Done the 21st day of May, A.D. 1527.

Questions for further thought and study:

1. How would you have responded to the charges laid against Sattler?
2. Which, if any, do you think were accurate?

Maria of Montjoie



The Martyrs' Mirror

One of the books that has often been found on the shelves of Mennonites through the centuries is a volume known as *The Martyrs' Mirror*, a detailed record of many of the executions faced by Anabaptists. The stories and drawings we find in this record are a touching testimony of the faith of the Anabaptist originators. The following are excerpts taken from an abbreviated edition.¹

Dirk Willems

In the year 1569 a pious, faithful brother and follower of Jesus Christ, named Dirk Willems, was apprehended at Asperen, in Holland, and had to endure severe tyranny from the papists. But as he had founded his faith not upon the drifting sand of human commandments, but upon the firm foundation stone, Christ Jesus, he, not withstanding all evil winds of human doctrine, and heavy showers of tyrannical and severe persecution, remained immovable and steadfast unto the end; wherefore, when the chief Shepherd shall appear in the clouds of heaven and gather together His elect from all the ends of the earth, he shall also through grace hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." 1 Peter 5:4, Matthew 24:31; 25:23.

Concerning his apprehension, it is stated by trustworthy persons, that when he fled he was hotly pursued by a thief-catcher, and as there had been some frost, said Dirk Willems ran before over the ice, getting across with considerable peril. The thief-catcher following him broke through, when Dirk Willems, perceiving that the former was in danger of his life, quickly returned and aided him in getting out, and thus saved his life. The thief-catcher wanted to let him go, but the burgomaster, very sternly called to him to consider his oath, and thus he was again seized by the thief-catcher, and, at said place, after severe imprisonment and great trials proceeding from the deceitful papists, put to death at a lingering fire by these bloodthirsty, ravening wolves, enduring it with great steadfastness, and confirming the genuine faith of the truth with his death and blood, as an instructive example to all pious Christians of this time, and to the everlasting disgrace of the tyrannous papists.

Maria of Montjoie, Eifel Mountains

The authorities tormented her for three days in succession, but could not induce her to forsake her faith, since she would adhere to Christ; for according to the Scriptures, no one is ever



Dirk Willems

Martyrs' Mirror

confounded, who fears God from the heart. The bailiff entreated her to go to church and he would release her, and give her board for a whole year; but she would not consent, but desired to adhere to Christ, and to give her life for His sake; whereupon she was condemned to be drowned.

On the way, Maria said: "I have been the bride of a man; but today I hope to be the bride of Christ, and to inherit His kingdom with Him." As they approached the water, one of the hypocrites said: "O Maria, repent, or it will not go well with you." At the water, they delayed with her over two hours, thinking that they could induce her to apostatize, forsake the truth, and follow them. Thereupon Maria said: "I adhere to my God; proceed with what you have come here for; the wheat is in the straw; it must be threshed, so the Word of God has begun, and must be finished." With this, she undressed, willingly surrendered herself, and said: "O heavenly Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and was thus drowned, and died, confessing the name of God, and sealing it with her death to the consolation of all believers.

Geleyn Cornelisz of South Holland

Geleyn, the shoemaker, was tortured most cruelly of all. They stripped him naked, and suspended him by his right thumb, with a weight attached to his left foot, and while thus suspended he was burned under his arms with candles and fire, and scourged until the two commissaries of the Duke of Alva, who were present, themselves became tired, and went away and sat down to play

cards, the executioner looking on, for about an hour, or an hour and a half. Meanwhile Geleyn was left suspended, who, during all the time that they played, experienced no pain, but was as though he had been in a sweet slumber, or if a swoon; yea, he

Geleyn Cornelisz



Martyrs' Mirror

subsequently himself testified that he never in his life rested on his bed with less pain, than while he was suspended there.

When he began to revive again, he was let down; but he implicated no one, nor did he deny his faith, so that he was finally sentenced to the fire with Jan Pieterss and the young apprentice to be burnt alive. When they were standing at the stakes, and were being burned, the flames were wafted away so much from Geleyn, that the executioner had to hold him into the fire with a fork on the other side of the stake. Thus these, valiantly adhering to the truth, laid down their lives for it.

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Questions for further thought and discussion:

1. Why do you think that the Anabaptists, who seem to have been such innocent simple folk, were persecuted so severely?
2. What does it take to be willing to stand out in opposition to society, even to the point of death, like the Anabaptists did?
3. Discuss the comment of one Anabaptist who indicated that her greatest fear was that she would give in and recant under the pressure of torture.
4. How do you view the argument that might have been made by some Anabaptists who, when it came to life or death, said that the welfare of the family was the most important priority and one should compromise his outward beliefs so as to remain alive to provide a home for one's children?

Anabaptists in the Netherlands: Menno Simons

Menno Simons

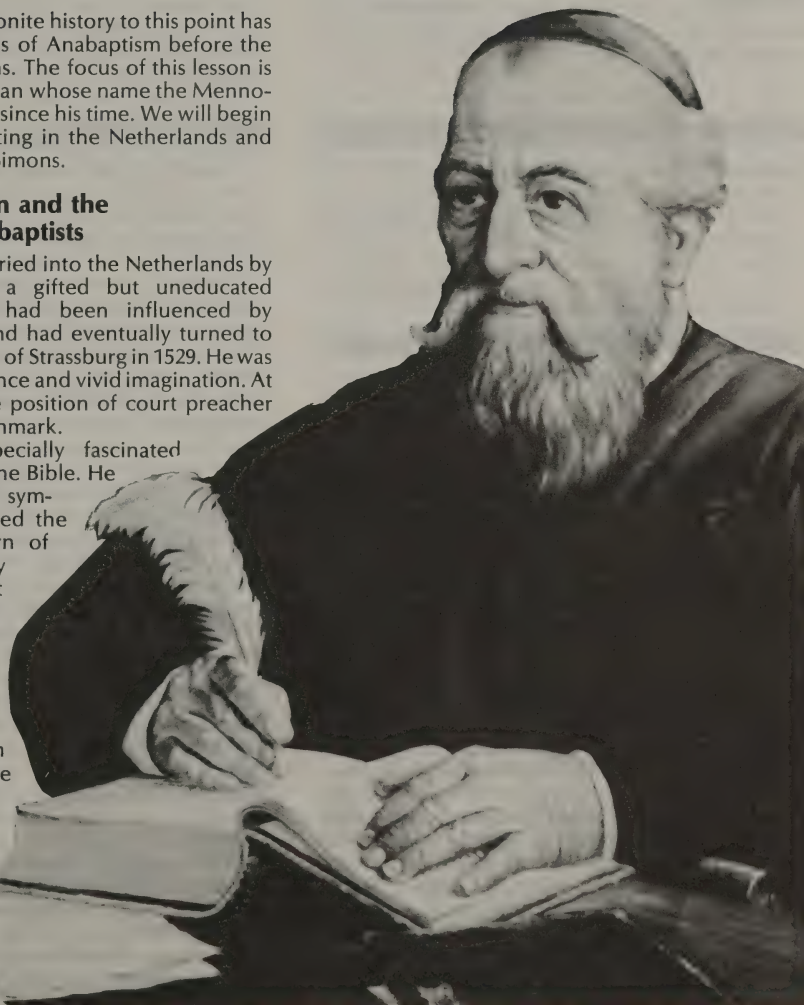
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Our study of Mennonite history to this point has focused on the origins of Anabaptism before the time of Menno Simons. The focus of this lesson is Menno Simons, the man whose name the Mennonite church has borne since his time. We will begin by looking at the setting in the Netherlands and then turn to Menno Simons.

Melchior Hofmann and the revolutionary Anabaptists

Anabaptism was carried into the Netherlands by Melchior Hofmann, a gifted but uneducated preacher. Hofmann had been influenced by Zwingli and Luther and had eventually turned to Anabaptism in the city of Strassburg in 1529. He was a man of great eloquence and vivid imagination. At one time he held the position of court preacher under the king of Denmark.

Hofmann was especially fascinated by the prophecies of the Bible. He made much of biblical symbolism. He emphasized the nearness of the return of Christ and eventually predicted that Christ would return in 1533. He himself would first be imprisoned, but at the return of Christ he would be released and would perform the functions of Elijah in the last days. The city of Strassburg, Hofmann believed, had been chosen as the new Jerusalem. Six months before the new kingdom was to be established, Hofmann travelled there and met his arrest



with open arms. He died in prison ten long years later, rather than the short six months he had expected.

With Hofmann in prison, the leadership shifted to even more fanatical individuals, Jan Matthijs and Jan van Leiden, who continued the emphasis on the last days but added the new element of the use of violence to support their views.

Meanwhile, the witness of the peaceful Anabaptists in the Netherlands had not been totally silenced. Two brothers, Obbe and Dirk Philips, sons of a priest in Leeuwarden, did not accept the extreme emphasis on prophecy and rejected the use of violence. They led a group sometimes known by the name of Obbenites. It was with them that Menno Simons became affiliated.

Menno's conversion to Anabaptism

It was while Menno was struggling with some of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church that he became aware of the revolutionary Anabaptists. In many things he found himself in agreement with the Münsterites, as the revolutionary Anabaptists had come to be called, but he found their use of violence totally unacceptable. For that reason he began to speak out against them. Thus he found himself in the dilemma of discouraging dissatisfied members from joining the Münsterites but unable to offer them an attractive alternative.

The climax of the conflict in his soul came with the tragedy at the Old Cloister near Bolsward when almost three hundred misguided souls lost their lives, among them his own brother in the flesh. The group was one of those referred to earlier, which had been imbued with the poison of the Münsterite revolution, and had decided to set up its own city of refuge and begin its own campaign for the kingdom of God in Friesland. In March, 1535, a large company of three hundred had seized an old monastery (Oude Klooster) outside of the city of Bolsward and entrenched itself therein. They were unable to hold out long against the siege of the forces of the government and after one hundred thirty had been slain, the rest were captured and executed on April 7th. The sight of these "poor misguided sheep," as Menno called them, giving their blood and their lives for their faith, even though it was a false faith, made an extraordinary impression upon Menno. He could not cast it off. They had given their lives for error, while he was not willing to give anything for the truth, but merely for fear of losing his reputation and his income continued to be a part of a system which his conscience had rejected. If he had had the courage to come out into the open, renounce Catholic doctrine and practices, and be a shepherd to these erring sheep, perhaps he could have saved them and averted the tragedy. Their blood, he felt, was upon his soul, and there it burned deeply to his shame. "The blood of these people," he said, "became such a burden to me that I could not endure it nor find rest in my soul." It was true that he had spoken against some of the abominations of the papal system, but out of fear of the "cross of his Lord" he had not made a clean breach with the whole system.

The tragedy of the Old-Cloisterites brought Menno to the parting of the ways; he now saw clearly his duty. As a servant of God he could not evade the responsibility to help the erring sheep, and as one who professed obedience and trust in God he dared no longer refuse to take up the cross of persecution and suffering whatever the

Questions for review and discussion:

1. How do you think persecution might have influenced men like Hofmann to take up the type of positions that they did?
2. Speculate on the kind of situations and atmosphere that leads to extreme emphasis on predictions about the end time.

Menno Simons 1496

The early years of Menno Simons

Menno Simons was born in the village of Witmarsum in the province of Friesland in the far northwest corner of continental Europe in the year 1496. His parents were devout Christians and consecrated their son to the service of the church. In preparation for this service Menno spent long years as a monk, perhaps in the Franciscan Monastery at Bolsward, studying languages and theology. The Bible, however, to a large extent remained a closed book to him.

Menno Simons was ordained in March 1524, at the age of twenty-eight. He was a Catholic priest at Pingjum and then in his home village of Witmarsum. He served as a priest for twelve years and outwardly performed the regular duties of a small country village priest. Inwardly, however, he experienced a struggle over the Roman Catholic practice of the Mass as well as over infant baptism. In spite of these doubts and the occasional intensive study of Scripture, he confessed later that he spent much of his time joining his fellow priests in "playing cards, drinking, and frivolities of all sorts, as was the custom of such unfruitful men."

cost might be. He could no longer go against his conscience and conviction. (From Harold S. Bender, *Menno Simons' Life and Writing*. Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1936, pp. 15-16.)

Questions for review and discussion:

1. What was there about the Old Cloister tragedy that bothered Menno Simons' conscience?
2. Why do you think Menno stayed on as priest as long as he did?
3. Compare the spiritual pilgrimage of Menno Simons with the reformers Luther and Zwingli. Which things were similar and which were different?

Menno as the Anabaptist leader

Even though Menno Simons was not founder of the Mennonite church, not even in the Netherlands, he was one of the greatest leaders the Anabaptists had. The following reading, taken from the novel The Broken Chalice by Myron Augsburger, describes the role of Menno in the Anabaptist movement. In this excerpt, the main characters of the novel, Soetgen and Willem, meet Menno Simons:

(Willem and Soetgen) saw a lone figure coming across the meadow, just beyond the willows. They watched him as he approached, his hurried step broken by a limp, a walking stick in his hand, and his broad hat tilted back on his head. As he drew near, they could see his chest rise and fall with his heavy breathing.

The stranger stopped at the edge of the lot which surrounded house and barn. He raised his hand in a friendly greeting and said breathlessly, "Peace be to your house."

"And to yours," responded Willem.

The man stood in silence a moment, breathing deeply. Obviously he was exhausted. They saw him look carefully at each member of the family. There was a bit of a smile in his eyes, almost wistful, as he looked at the children. His gaze came back to Willem and to Soetgen.

"May I be so bold as to ask for a beaker of milk and perhaps a piece of bread? As you can see, I've been on a hurried trip." He chuckled a bit as he looked down at his mud-flecked trousers.

"Of course," said Willem. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, sir, I'd best not. I'll drink it here, if you don't mind. Besides, it's for your good." He paused. "You see, I'm what they call an Anabaptist, and I'd not want you to suffer for kindness to me."

Soetgen heard Willem draw in his breath sharply. Her own pulse quickened. For once they were meeting one of the hated group. What should she do, feed him? She looked at Willem, his gaze fixed on the stranger; finally he turned slowly and nodded to her. Picking up one of the pails, she hurried into the house. Choosing a large mug, she poured it brimming full, got two rolls, and hurried back to the men.

The stranger was sitting on the back of the cart. He looked tired, leaning forward with his hands on his knees. He looked up from under his hat, showing a wrinkled forehead and lock of brown-gray hair, over his temple. He was a much older man than she had earlier thought. With a smile, he thanked her for the milk and bread, and then bowed his head. "Father, for Thy goodness and for these kind friends I thank Thee. Grant us each wisdom and the will to walk with Thee, in the name of our Lord. Amen."

With this he drank about a third of the mug of milk and then started eating a roll. Looking at Willem, he said, "I owe you a better introduction. I'm Menno Simons, leader of the brotherhood of believers' church, which you have heard called heretical. There's a price of one hundred Carlguilders on my head, as you may know, and I would not endanger your home by coming inside. Should you be asked, you did not know my name when you gave me to eat." With this he smiled as though living in danger was an everyday affair.

At their stunned silence he continued, "Just today I barely escaped with my life. That is why I arrived so exhausted. I've been running for several hours, and my feet can scarcely keep up with my heart!

"I was riding the canal boat toward Antwerp when I noticed horsemen riding up from the south. As they came near, I could see they were commissaries and suspected they were after me. They reined up on the bank just ahead of the boat, and as we drew near, they called to the boatswain, asking if one Menno Simons was aboard. The canal wasn't too wide there and we were near the north bank, so I said to the boatman, 'You can tell them no,' and I jumped for the land and off across country as fast as I could go." He looked up with a twinkle in his eyes, "You should have heard their shouts!" Then his face grew serious.

"They'll not give up the chase, the bloodthirsty

papists. They may call here. You didn't shelter me; so you are free, and you don't know where I'm going."

Willem said, "But it is late, and you can't go on."

"Oh, but I can," he said. "I've done it many times before." And his eyes grew wistful, "Away from my wife and family most of the time, to save them as well as myself. I am a man of the Way, living on the move, hated and hunted, called a heretic and a hedgepreacher, but," and here he looked at them with a fire in his eyes and a glow on his face, "I'm happier than when I was a capricious priest."

Willem looked at him almost incredulously. "You mean, sir, that you enjoy this freedom?"

"To which freedom are you referring?"

"Well, sir, the freedom to roam as you are."

"Mr. —uh?" and Menno paused with a wrinkled brow which asked the question.

"Van den Houte," Willem said. "Willem and Soetgen."

Menno Simons smiled, "Mr. van den Houte, roaming isn't freedom. The freedom I enjoy is an inner one. True freedom is in Christ, to live as a member of His kingdom, slave to the tyranny of no man!" His voice rang with his words.

"But," expostulated Soetgen, "your wife, your family, don't they resent this?"

"Resent it? Yes, we both have resented it, needing to be apart, always on the run—for the sake of the cause, not out of fear, for we live daringly," and here he smiled looking down at the latest marks of flight. "But," he said, resuming the conversation, "we resented it, believing that all men and women should be free to live by faith and conscience rather than by coercion."

"Then your wife," Soetgen interrupted. "She believes as you do?"

"Yes, she did, but she's gone now. Two years ago she became ill, and then passed on with the blessed ones." Here he sat in silence for a long moment, doubtless thinking of her, then added, "We are heirs together in the grace of God."

Heirs together! The words caught Soetgen's attention, and she pondered them, lost to the conversation. Suddenly his voice brought her back to the moment.

"Ours is a cross-bearing church. It is my lot to be away from those I love, to meet them only for a moment for a brief rendezvous at some secluded spot, and assure them of my love, to know that my family is watched every day in an effort to catch me coming home. This has been our lot for years and continues to be. I'm only in this area for a brief trip from Holstein, visiting our churches."

Soetgen looked at Willem and noticed that he seemed moved.

"But I must leave now," and he got to his feet, stretched his stooped frame a bit from its stiffness, and reached his hand to Willem. "I thank you, sir, for your kindness, and for listening. And perhaps we can meet again." Now he glanced at Soetgen as well. "You, too, can be heirs together of His grace."

Turning back to Willem, he said, "Visit one of our meetings; there are many around Ghent, almost daily. The city is so large that we are lost in the shuffle. We even meet in the woods, behind hedges or in the fields, or in boats on the river—anywhere we can gather. We can discuss faith freely elsewhere, here I endanger your home."

"I bid you adieu, my friends, and God give you His peace."

With this he turned and started slowly across the meadow. They watched his dark figure go up the dike and then disappear into the dusk. They stood in silence until the chatter of the children caught their attention. Having entered the house, Willem took care of the milk and Soetgen spread the table. Both were strangely silent through the evening and retired early, each with his own thoughts. A different world had invaded theirs; it was impossible to ignore it. (Myron S. Augsburg, *The Broken Chalice*, copyright © 1971 by Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa. Used by permission.)

Question for review and discussion:

What was the significance of Menno Simons?

The Mennonite Search for a Home

What happened to the Mennonites after the time of Menno Simons? How long did the persecution last? Where did the Mennonites stay before they came to North America? This lesson will look at the Mennonite search for a home in Europe and their emigrations to North America and Russia.

Continued persecution in Europe

1. Switzerland

The story of the Mennonites in Switzerland is one long, dreary tale of persecution. It was not until 1815 that the Mennonites in the canton of Bern in Switzerland were granted complete religious toleration.

The last execution recorded in the *Martyrs' Mirror* is the beheading of Hans Landis in 1614. Landis, an influential preacher, continued his ministerial duties contrary to the decree of the Zürich Council. This brought about his arrest, and he was condemned to be a slave in one of the Venetian galleys. However, with the help of an instrument smuggled to him by a friend, Landis filed through the chains that held him captive and returned to his native land. He was once again arrested, and when he refused to go into exile, he was condemned to death.

Even after the death penalty was done away with in Switzerland, Mennonites were refused the right of practicing their religion, commanded to attend the state church, and ordered to have their children baptized and their marriages performed by the state clergy. Refusal to comply with these demands meant fines, imprisonment, and service in the navy galley boats. Property was confiscated, their children were declared illegitimate, they were shipped and branded on their foreheads, and finally, at death, they were refused burial in the common cemeteries.

In 1671 seven hundred men, women, and children were exiled from Bern and Zürich, penniless and helpless. If they returned they were to be publicly scourged with rods, branded, and expelled again.

2. The Netherlands

During the sixteenth century the Mennonites of the Netherlands were subjected to the most severe persecution, under the reign of Emperor Charles and his son Philip. The methods of execution were cruel and merciless. Burning at the stake, or occasionally roasting on a slow fire, drowning by being placed in a bag and thrown into the water, and sometimes burying alive were methods commonly used. The rack was used to stretch men and women until their bones cracked and blood flowed; tongues and limbs were pierced and pinched in vises to force recantation or more indicting information.

The last Mennonite to be executed in southern Holland was a young woman by the name of Anneken van den Hove. After two years in prison she was buried alive in 1597. After a pit was dug and she was thrown in, the executioners

continued to throw dirt and thick sods of heath ground upon her body, up to her throat; but notwithstanding all their asking, threatening or promising to release her and take her out of the pit if she would recant, it was all in vain and she would not hearken to it. Hence they threw much additional earth and sod upon her face and whole body, and stamped with their feet upon it that she should die the sooner. This was the end of this pious heroine of Jesus Christ. (*Martyrs' Mirror*, p. 1,094.)

The winning of Dutch independence from Roman Catholic Spain brought about a new policy of toleration. The Union of Utrecht of 1579 provided a new freedom of religion. Some oppression of the Mennonites continued but imprisonment and execution ended.

Mennonites soon found a place for themselves in the society, in spite of continuing restrictions. In the latter part of the seventeenth century the Mennonites reached their peak in numbers as well as spiritually and culturally, but in the next years they went into a decline until the nineteenth century. What persecution had not been able to do,

tolerance and luxury did. Hans de Ries wrote, "The goods are enriched but the soul is impoverished. Clothing has become precious but the internal decorations have perished. Love has cooled and diminished, and quarreling has increased." (Quoted in C. J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, pp. 101-102.)

3. Prussia

The kings of Poland and Prussia were often quite inconsistent in their policies toward the Mennonites. By the seventeenth century the Mennonites had gained a reputation of being good farmers and able to reclaim swamplands for agricultural purposes. Already in 1642 King Wladislaw IV of Poland issued an edict favoring the Mennonite settlement of his lands. However, the non-Mennonite population, envious of the economic success of these unorthodox people, often called for their expulsion soon after the Mennonites had been able to establish themselves.

Occasionally the Mennonite refusal to serve in the army also got them into trouble. In 1723 the East Prussian king, Frederick William I, sent out his recruiting party among the Mennonites to find some tall fellows with a fine physique to serve in the personal guard of the king. The Mennonite church elders interceded and the young men were released, but mass expulsion of the Mennonites from East Prussia resulted.

Under Frederick the Great (1740-1786), the expelled Mennonites were invited back, and real tolerance and religious freedom came at last to the Mennonites. Frederick returned the farms which had been confiscated and granted Mennonites in the cities full civil rights. The Mennonites' belief in nonresistance was to be respected. Thus, when West Prussia came under the control of Frederick the Great, the Mennonites in the area were very pleased and indicated their loyalty to their new king with a gift of products from their farms—two well-fed oxen, four hundred pounds of butter, twenty cakes of cheese, and a large number of chickens and ducks. An Edict of Toleration was issued by Frederick in 1780 which granted:

- a) freedom of worship
- b) the right to erect churches
- c) permission to establish their own schools
- d) the privilege of substituting an affirmation for an oath
- e) the right to enter any line of industry
- f) the right to bury their dead in their own cemetery

This liberal concession was to be granted to the Mennonites on the condition that they would pay an annual sum of five thousand *Thaler* for the support of the military academy at Culm.

The favorable conditions, however, did not last. In 1789 the successor to Frederick the Great, Frederick William II, issued an edict which brought a halt to the rapid growth of the Mennonites. It became apparent that both the state church and the war office were bent on ending the favorable times of the Mennonites. Once again it was time to look for a new home.

Questions for further discussion and thought:

1. Speculate on what would have been the results of the lengthy and severe persecution in Switzerland.
2. Speculate on the effect that the gradual easing of persecution had on the Mennonites.
3. Why do you think the Mennonites would have wanted to establish their own schools?
4. What do you think of the Prussian Mennonite way of discriminating between joining the military and paying a special tax?

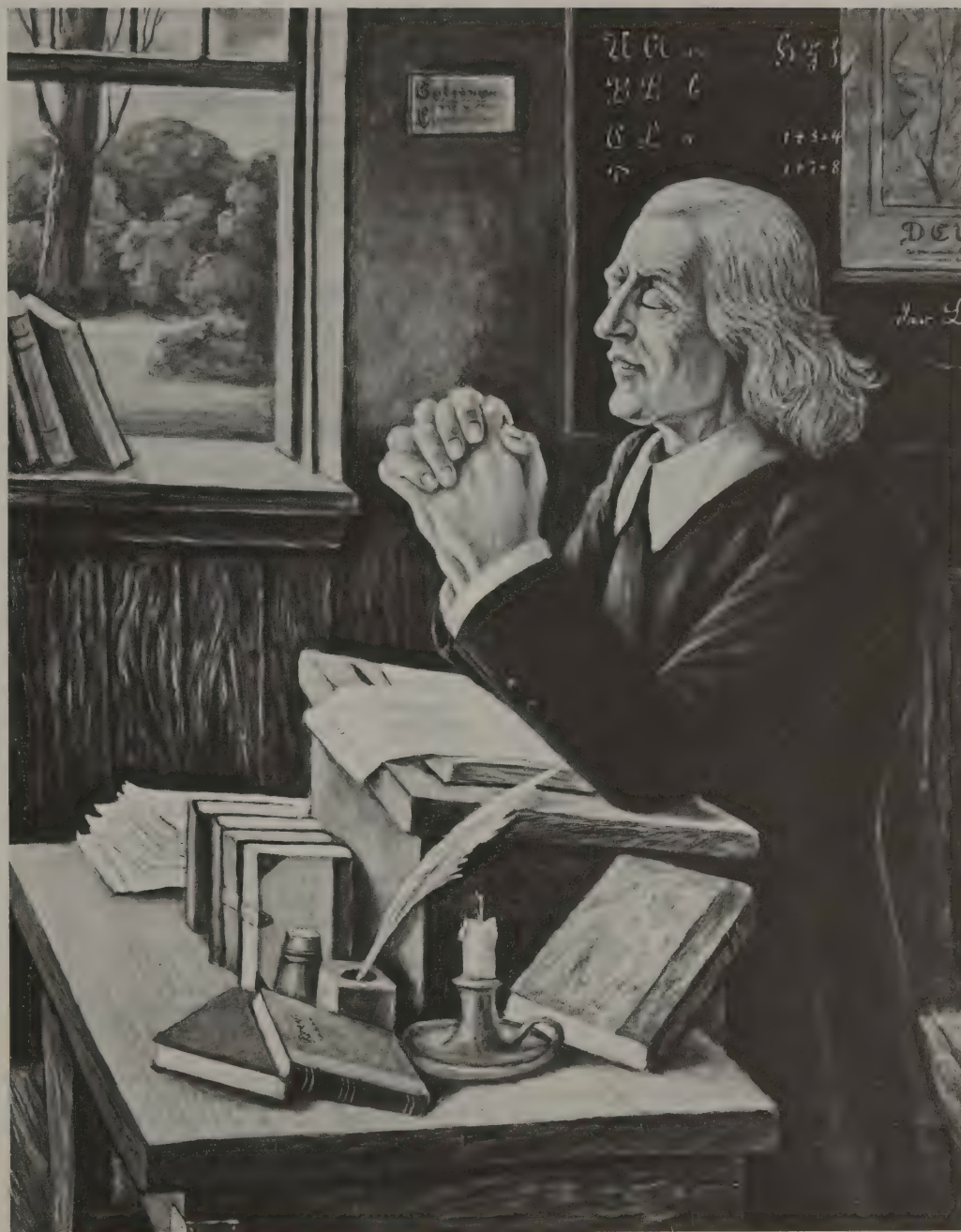
Emigrations to North America

The persecution and insecurity eventually led the Mennonites, like so many other Europeans, to look to America as their new home. The first permanent settlement in the New World was made up of Dutch Mennonites who migrated in 1683 with a group of Quakers to the area of Germantown, which was then some seven miles north of Philadelphia. This first party of immigrants which consisted of thirteen men, eleven women, one youth, and eight children, came from Crefeld. Two infants were born on the ten-and-a-half-week sailboat trip, and one woman died en route to Germantown. A memorable day for American Mennonitism was October 6, 1683, when the first permanent Mennonite settlers arrived in the New World.

At first, the few Mennonites at Germantown worshiped with the Society of Friends, but they soon began to meet alone. In 1690, William Rittenhouse was chosen as minister and Jan Neuss as deacon. In 1707 a second group of Mennonites of Swiss ethnic origin came from the Palatinate to Germantown, but to the disappointment of the first group, they initially felt it best not to merge with them.

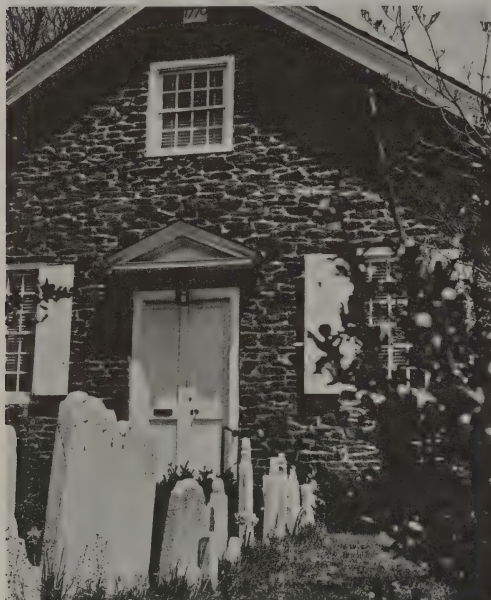
In 1708 the Palatine Mennonites decided to join the congregation from the north of Europe after all. Three new deacons and two new ministers were chosen. Rittenhouse had died in the meantime, so

A schoolteacher by the name of Christopher Dock was one of the immigrants in these early years. He arrived in Pennsylvania in 1718. Dock has sometimes been called the "dean" of North American Mennonite teachers. He wrote one of the first books of rules on conduct for teachers and students published in North America, called *Schul-Ordnung* (School Management). It is said that Christopher Dock's custom was to spend time on his knees in prayer for his students at the end of each day. It was in this attitude of prayer that he was found dead in the fall of 1771.



Oliver Wendell Schenk

This little stone meetinghouse in Germantown, Pennsylvania, was built by the first Mennonites to settle in America. It is the oldest Mennonite meetinghouse in America.



Paul Schrock

Jacob Gottschalk, on the basis of the authorization given by the Mennonite leaders back in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, proceeded to baptize and administer communion, although not formally ordained. Eleven new members were baptized on May 7, 1708, and the first communion was held on May 23. The little congregation built a log meetinghouse at Germantown in the same year.

It was not until the second decade of the eighteenth century that America emerged as a primary refuge from persecution in Europe. Three factors made the American colonies, especially Pennsylvania, an attractive region for future Mennonite settlements: the vigorous campaigning of William Penn to bring over settlers, the colonial schemes of certain officials in Bern, Switzerland, and the Palatine mass exodus of 1709. Between May and December of 1709 about thirteen thousand people from the Palatinate arrived in London, hoping to find a better place to live.

In 1717 another sizable Swiss Mennonite migration to America began. By 1756 some four thousand Swiss Mennonites had arrived in eastern Pennsylvania. They spread from there to the western regions of the province and into Virginia. The descendants of these settlers moved further to Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario.

Swiss Mennonite life in the eighteenth century was rural. The spread of the original settlements did not take place by establishing villages. Mennonite settlements were a group of scattered homesteads tied together in a congregation. The meetinghouse or church, if there was one, and the mill stood on a centrally situated farm. Flourishing homesteads, with two-story barns and log or stone houses, orchards, and fertile fields soon took shape. Their peculiar agricultural life, together with their social and religious ways, kept these pioneers a separate and distinct people in the new America.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

1. What were some of the reasons for emigration?
2. What do you think were some of the problems that faced the immigrants?

Emigrations to Russia

When Russian armies succeeded in pushing the Turkish troops southward and eastward and opening the vast regions of the Lower Volga and the Ukraine in the late 1700s, the Russian Czarina, Catherine II, invited Germans and other Europeans to settle and occupy the land. In 1786 she gave a special invitation to the Prussian Mennonites through her agent, George Trappe. Naturally, with the situation in Prussia beginning to look more and more bleak, the Mennonites were interested. They sent two representatives, Jacob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch, on the long and perilous journey to Russia to investigate the territory and bring back a firsthand report.

Hoepfner and Bartsch returned one year later with a very favorable report. They had met with Catherine, and she had promised a list of liberal concessions. These promises included:

1. Religious toleration
2. Military exemption
3. 175 acres of free land per family
4. Free use of crown forests
5. Tax exemption for ten years
6. A control of breweries and distilleries in the settlement, a trade the Mennonites had begun in Danzig and Prussia
7. Free transportation from Prussia to Russia
8. A substantial loan of money for each family
9. Complete control of schools and churches and a considerable degree of local autonomy

The response among the Mennonites was favorable, and the emigration began in 1788. By the fall of that year almost three hundred families had set out. The Prussian authorities, unwilling to lose

these industrious laborers, granted passports to the poor only.

The traveling was slow and the emigrants were forced to spend the winter at Dubrovna, both because of the approaching winter and because of the renewed fighting between the Russians and the Turks. It was a difficult winter for the pioneers who were poverty stricken and homeless. To make matters worse, they were without religious leadership. At this time in Prussia, ministers tended to come from the well-to-do class, and none of these had been permitted to leave. Consequently, the group had left unorganized and spiritually without a shepherd.

When spring came they continued their journey, only to suffer the greatest disappointment when they arrived at their destination. They would not be permitted to settle on the fertile fields chosen by their delegates because of the continuing Turkish wars there, but near the Chortitza River, on what seemed to be much less suitable farmland. The disappointment was so great that a small group at first refused to unpack.

This settlement, the first in Russia, became known as the Chortitza Colony or Old Colony. They organized themselves into eight villages or *Darps* partly because of the frontier lawlessness of the area. The first years were difficult due to the lack of supplies and farming skills in this new

terrain. To this was added the continuing lack of spiritual leadership, as well as a bitterness against Hoepfner and Bartsch, who were accused of having betrayed the trust of the colonists.

In a few years, however, the leadership question was settled by elders Cornelius Regier and Cornelius Warkentin from Prussia, and the economic condition improved. In 1803 the second major emigration began from Prussia. These immigrants settled in the fertile land southeast of Chortitza along the Molotschna River. They became known as the Molotschna Colony.

Questions for thought and discussion:

1. What effect would the new setting have had on the Mennonites from Prussia?
2. Discuss the statement made by Galenus Abrahams, a leading minister in Amsterdam, in which he suggested that the devil had found a clever way of dealing with the Mennonites by stopping persecution and having them become interested in the material things of the world.



A scene from an immigrant house in Kansas, 1874. The Santa Fe Railroad built these houses to provide shelter for the immigrants until they could build their own.

The Mennonite Experience in Russia

We have seen how while one group of Mennonites came to North America in the seventeenth century, another group, mainly from Prussia, emigrated to Russia in the eighteenth century. The story that unfolded in Russia in the next years is as captivating as any story in human history. It deals with perseverance and hardship; religious conviction and apathy; prosperity and poverty; success and tragedy.

Pre-revolution Russia

1. Economic development

The Mennonites soon overcame the hardships and difficulties of pioneer life in Russia and flourished economically and culturally. For the first time they were free to develop economically, socially, and religiously as they pleased. The situation seemed ideal. They had good land, they were separate from the rest of society, they were given tax exemption for the first years, and they were in control of their religious and social development. There was a ready market for their wheat and agricultural commodities.

The most influential person in guiding the economic and social development of the Mennonite colonies was Johann Cornies (1789-1848). An agricultural genius, he organized the *Agricultural Commission* in 1830. The Agricultural Commission not only greatly improved the farming methods but also had considerable influence in improving the schools and providing for social relief and child welfare. Under the Agricultural Commission the Mennonite education system became one of the best in Europe, having compulsory attendance already by 1843.

Not only did the Mennonites flourish in agriculture but also in industry, especially in the milling business. The first threshing machine was sold by a Mennonite manufacturer in 1853. By 1914, 6 percent of the total production of farm machinery in Russia was produced in Mennonite factories. Frank Epp writes, "By the early 1900s the Mennonite colonies in Russia had become the most

prosperous and well-developed rural communities in all of Russia. For half a century they had been the prize exhibits of Russian colonization officials. Well-planned villages with brick structures, painted fences, flower gardens, rolling fields of grain, millions of cattle and sheep, and expanding industries, were indeed a joy to behold. Schools, welfare institutions, and church life were at the height of their development." (*Mennonite Exodus* [Altona, Manitoba: D. W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., 1962], p. 27.)

2. Emigration again

Yet all was not roses. The colonies soon faced a critical land shortage. Prosperity had brought with it spiritual apathy. Politically, on the horizon one could already see a new era coming.

When it became apparent that the times were changing in Russia and that the day of special privileges was over, some Mennonites prepared to emigrate once again. Countries that were considered were Turkestan, Palestine, Australia, and the Americas. The way to North America was prepared by twelve deputies sent to spy out the land and bring back recommendations.

The twelve deputies were given a guided tour of the Canadian option, consisting of southern Manitoba, and a number of locations in the 1870 frontier line of United States, which included the southeastern territory of Dakota, through central Nebraska and Kansas, south into Texas. Both Canadian and American land agents were very interested in winning the favor of the delegation.

In Manitoba a four-day trip by boat on the Red River was followed by an inspection of eight townships of uncultivated prairie land thirty-five miles southeast of Winnipeg. The trek was a difficult one for the delegates. The wagon trails were poor and scarcely traveled; it was rainy and wet; the mosquitoes were at their thickest; the land looked swampy and difficult to farm.

The facts that land in Manitoba was free and available in large exclusive blocks, that military

exemption was guaranteed to be absolute, and that there would be no objection to the use of the German language were persuasive considerations for the Mennonite delegation. When the possibility of living under the British monarchy was added to these generous provisions, the Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde representatives were convinced that Manitoba was the place to recommend, in spite of the formidable frontier. The remaining delegates agreed that they should recommend United States with its more hospitable environment, in spite of the more liberal concessions made by the Canadian government.

Over half of those who came to the United States located in the State of Kansas along the frontier line. The Santa Fe Railroad Company sold them cheap land and gave them reduced freight rates and temporary housing while they built their own homes. The new settlements prospered, and congregations arose quickly. In 1882 they established the first Mennonite school for higher education in North America, which later became Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.

Meanwhile, these settlers in the United States were joined by about three hundred immigrants from Prussia and four hundred from Polish lands. They settled in Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

The Russian revolution and its aftermath

In the years from 1873 to 1880 about eighteen thousand Mennonites left Russia for United States and Canada. Those who stayed were granted an alternative to military service in the form of forestry service. Meanwhile, their population continued to grow. By 1914 there were approximately 120,000 Mennonites in Russia.

A series of devastations struck the Mennonite population in the early twentieth century which eventually led to the demise of the Mennonite Commonwealth. The suspicion and animosity generated against the German-speaking Mennonites in World War I, the terror and destruction of the revolution and the famine and disease that came in its wake all contributed to what many came to consider an unbearable life. The following is an excerpt from the diary of Dietrich Neufeld, a Mennonite teacher of that time.

1. The terror of civil war

October 24 There has been a terrible massacre. It was rumored several days ago but we didn't believe it. Today the rumor was definitely confirmed. The village of Eichenfeld-Dubovka—only twenty miles north of here—no longer exists

as of the eighteenth of October. Many of the people here had relatives and friends there.

On the evening of the seventeenth, mounted bands suddenly surrounded the village in a carefully organized surprise raid. They attacked all the farmsteads simultaneously, so that the inhabitants could not warn each other. They proceeded to cut down in cold blood all the villagers over fifteen. Eighty-four people lost their lives.

We are told of heart-rending scenes where women tried to shield their husbands or sons with their own bodies only to lose their lives in the process. Barefoot and in nightclothes many of the women with their children fled in terror. It

This windmill in the village of Blumenort in Russia depicts the peaceful life of the Russian Mennonites in the 19th century.



was a bitterly cold night. They sought refuge in the neighboring village (Adelsheim) four miles away. But even there they were not allowed to rest. The slaughter began there also, but for some strange reason was confined to only ten farmsteads.

Then the bandits, many of whom were recognized as coming from neighboring Ukrainian villages (probably Fedorovka and Augustinovka), withdrew. Soon more Russians from nearby villages came in big wagons and carted away everything that was portable from the forty farmsteads of the deserted Eichenfeld. Even the roofs were pulled down and dragged away.

We await our own fate in a state of unbearable tension. The mental strain we are under dwarfs all the other afflictions which we have to bear daily. So far our sentence has not been executed. But it is very clear that we will never be able to appease this gang of assassins. . . .

October 27 We all have our particular destinies. But there is hardly a family hereabouts, it seems to me, which has had so many tragic blows as the family W. I got to know them at the beginning of our enslavement. Their house is not far from ours and can be reached without going through the street. After my first visit to the family, they asked me to come back as often as possible. I can understand that. We all feel the need, occasionally, to see the faces of people who are not Anarchists and to be able to speak freely for a change. I have become a kind of a father-confessor to the family W. They are sensitive people, especially the father, and probably suffer more mental anguish than most others.

Everytime I drop over there there are new lines of suffering and sorrow in his face. How it must have hurt him to see insolent intruders take over his house and confine his family to two small rooms. He was forced to submit while these coarse brutes emptied wardrobes and chests, searched through pockets for watches, knives, and wallets, and pulled the wedding ring off his finger. And he had to tremble in silence when the innocence of his daughters was threatened.

But when they came to abduct the eldest, a real beauty, he could restrain himself no longer. He spoke up then, but forced himself to remain calm so as not to reveal his inner turmoil. He tried to convince them that his daughter was sick and had to keep to her bed. He had hidden her, but he knew if they found her she was lost.

Even though he saved her that first time, he knew that the danger remained as long as the men were in the vicinity. The strain of waiting for them to come back is worse than the visits

themselves, he says. His nerves won't allow him to sleep much; on those occasions when he is able to relax enough to fall asleep there is sure to be another night visit from these hyenas. Then again his heart convulses as though in the grip of an eagle's talons. Shivering with cold and terror he has to stand aside as they turn the house upside down once again and maltreat its occupants as though they are common criminals or enemies against whom they have to wreak vengeance.

Pouring out his grief to me is perhaps Mr. W.'s only source of relief. Just having a sympathetic listener is a comfort to him. He and I agree that emigration offers the only way out of our situation here in Russia—if we survive at all. We talk a lot about countries that are more stable, with more settled conditions and a better social order. When I relate my experiences in foreign countries the effect is like soothing music. For a few moments he can forget his tribulations. Because I know this, I bring our conversation around to this theme as often as I can. But everytime I return, I find him in despair again. Like so many of us, he finds it more and more difficult to believe that there is a way out, a hope for better times. Losing one's capacity for hope is the ultimate catastrophe.

Fate shows no mercy. Yesterday when I called on W. I found the whole family in a state of shock. They handed me a letter written by a relative and delivered to them secretly. It read as follows:

Dear Brother and Sister,

We write to you with petrified hearts and bewildered feelings. They came to our house. They undressed us down to our underclothes and began their sport with us. They shot our father through both hands and forced him to sit down at the table with them. They wanted him to drink a toast with them! Father gave us a look of profound anguish. It cut us to our souls. We all stood there in mute agony while they mocked and jeered us.

But that wasn't enough for them. They took brother John upstairs, cut him about the face with sabres and tried to hack off his arms. He ran outside and later we found his body in a pile of chaff. They—for whom we can find no name because there is no word to describe them—had evidently enjoyed increasing the dying man's pain by sprinkling chaff into his wounds.

Our youngest brother thought he could intimidate them by standing up to them, but they shot him and hacked him down. They beat our nephew Frank with knouts and blunt objects until he fell unconscious, never to wake up again. Henry tried to escape with his wife and child; but



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Through their newly formed relief agency, the Mennonite Central Committee, hundreds of starving Russian Mennonites were fed.

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we found them later in the garden—dead.

We are also wounded. My left ear is half gone and I have deep gashes on my forehead. I also have a dressing on my hand. An old shirt had to serve us for bandages. We have left our house and are in hiding with friends in the next village. We are mentioning no names because we don't know into whose hands this letter will fall. We also hear dreadful stories about our village. We wonder whether you are still alive.

In another hand were added the words:

Dear Loved Ones: If we should ever meet again in this life, then let us take hands and without looking back leave the land of our shame forever.

I let the sheet fall on the table and looked up. Oh despair! What could I say to them? Words seemed hopelessly inadequate for such a heavy blow. Silently, I pressed their hands and left. (From *The Russian Dance of Death*, Dietrich Neufeld, translated and edited by Al Reimer, copyright © 1977 by Hyperion Press, Ltd., Winnipeg, Man. R2M 2S9, pp. 43-44, 46-48. Published in the United States by Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa. 15683. Used by permission.)

2. Hunger

Gerhard Schroeder also survived the plunder, disease and hunger. He describes the devastation of hunger in the following way:

Hungry people will not rebel. They will not instigate revolution. A person that is hungry will just suffer hunger and die. The mental effect was terrible, just to think that you with all your education, at an age when you are considered in the prime of your life, are unable to provide food for yourself, for your wife and children. In the evening you go to bed hungry. You take a look at your family already in bed. You know they have gone to bed hungry. It takes a long time for you to fall asleep because of the gnawing thoughts of

hunger, of helplessness, of being destitute. You are perishing . . . you are going down . . . you have to die . . . slowly. You are getting weaker and weaker. . . . These thoughts drive you almost to insanity.

I will never forget an incident that happened about this time. I was walking in Rosental southward, up a hill we called *der Hemmberg*. There was a man driving uphill in a one-horse cart. That poor horse must not have had any feed for quite awhile and right near the hill that horse suddenly dropped dead. I stopped and looked at an amazing scene. People from everywhere, with knives, hatchets and other tools came running, pushing, shoving, and yelling at each other, and before this man could save anything they had cut up that horse by chopping off the head, legs, etc. The whole horse was cut to pieces and carried away piece by piece. Everyone wanted a piece of that dead horse just to prolong life.

3. Carloads of American food

Finally, help came from American Mennonites through their newly formed organization, the Mennonite Central Committee.

Like wildfire, the message went through our village. The American food had arrived at the railroad station. This was March 13, 1922. In my diary I find these words written, "Hooray! Three carloads of American food at the railroad station." Many of us went to see these railroad cars.

When they opened them and we could see the products sent to us from across the sea we rejoiced in our hearts, and when I came home and told my family what my eyes had seen we resolved that we would never forget this day, but we would remember it as a memorial of our being saved from death by hunger; we saw tangible evidence of this fact. For supper we drank our *Prips* and ate a piece of what we at that time called bread. We all seemed to be in a happy mood and the question was asked, "Where will we be next year?"

We received a letter from Truda's parents in the Molotschna that they too were without bread.

The following day we had a wonderful prayer meeting with many praises and thanks expressed because of the help sent from abroad.

March 16th was the first day we received some food from the American soup kitchen. It was somewhat cold and we had to stand in line for quite a time to get our share of about one-third of a pound of white bread and a dish of soup. It was hard to stand there in line for a long period of time, but we were happy and thankful to God for his help. (From *Miracles of Grace and Judgement*, Gerhard P. Schroeder, © Gerhard P. Schroeder, 1974, pp. 201-203, 282. Used by permission.)

Further Migrations to North America

We have seen that in the seventeenth century Mennonites had already made their way to the new world of North America. Those Mennonites who had remained in Russia after the first major emigration to North America were now also anxious to find a new home. This lesson tells about the final major emigrations of Mennonites to North America, and then it takes a look at some of the problems and concerns Mennonites have had in their North American home.

Emigration to North America in the twentieth century

I. From Russia in the 1920s

After many months of negotiating and a great deal of hard work by men like David Toews and B. B. Janz, a large group of Mennonites was allowed into Canada from Russia. The first group was expected in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, on July 21, 1923. It was an exciting day for the little village of Rosthern, some forty miles north of Saskatoon. The Kanadier, as the established Canadian Mennonites were called, were prepared to give the newcomers a warm reception. Mennonites from the surrounding areas made their way to Rosthern in their Studebakers, Model T Fords, buggies, and wagons to receive the immigrants. It was the biggest event the little town had ever known.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the long train with ten passenger and three baggage cars pulled into Rosthern. North of the station and east of the tracks the immigrants detrained. The scenes that followed defied description. There was crying and there was hearty rejoicing. When the first wave of emotion had passed, the immigrants massed in a body. Gerhard Ens mounted a small platform and introduced David Toews, who addressed the newcomers briefly, assured them of his sympathy and understanding for their sorrow and privations, and welcomed them on behalf of the Canadian Mennonites. After he had spoken the immigrants brought a song of

greeting, "Gott grüsse dich" (God Greet You). This was followed by the hymn of thanksgiving, "Nun danket alle Gott" (Now Thank We All Our God). Then Abram Hamm, the leader of the party, arose and expressed his appreciation for the welcome and assured the Canadians "that the ambition of the immigrant Mennonites was to adjust themselves to Canadian conditions, to adopt Canadian customs, and to become, not an alien race with the privileges of Canadians, but Canadians worthy of the name." Gerald Brown, a reporter for the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, described the service:

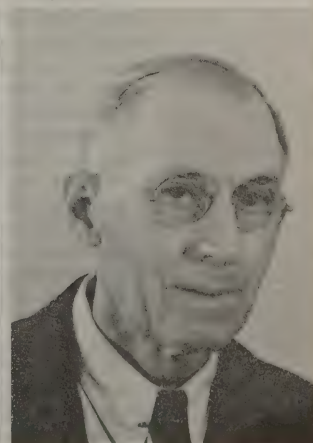
A great hush fell upon the assembled thousands and to the ears of the Canadians came a soft, slow chant, "Lobe den Herrn den mächtigen König der Ehren," which is the German equivalent of our own "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow." Besides being a favorite hymn of the Mennonites, it is their nearest approach to a

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David Toews



B. B. Janz



national anthem. Softly the chant rose and fell, seeming to be a musical expression of the great tragedy and heartbreak of the Mennonites. Then the Canadian Mennonites took up the song, and the tone increased in volume, growing deeper and fuller, until the melody was pouring forth from several thousand throats. When the first note of the song burst upon the air, every Mennonite removed his hat, and the others paid like tribute. There were many in the crowd who had sprung from other races, but the significance of the song was manifest to them when they saw their Mennonite friends bare their heads and when they saw grown men, whom they had known for years, burst into tears. (From *The Mennonite Exodus* by Frank Epp, copyright © D. W. Friesen & Sons, Ltd., Altona, Manitoba. Used by permission.)

Question for discussion:

Can you imagine what it must have felt like to have come through the chaos and suffering of Russia and be greeted by happy, well-fed Mennonites in a land of plenty and peace?

2. From Russia in the 1940s

Many Mennonites who wanted to emigrate in the 1920s were not able to. By 1930 only a few were allowed to leave Russia. In some ways, however, history repeated itself during World War II when Germany once again attacked Russia and the German troops occupied the Ukraine and the Mennonite territories. When the Germans were forced back in 1943, many Mennonites retreated out of Russia to Germany together with the fleeing armies. The following is an excerpt from a diary written by Anna Falk Loewen about this escape.

October 7 . . . Yesterday the neighboring villages received notice to drive their wagons to our yards and take us to the little railway station at Kanzerowka. We were allowed to take some bedding, clothing, flour, and lard with us. We gathered at the edge of the village. As we waited for several stragglers I remembered that I had kept the key to the piano in my purse. I ran back, for it would have been unfortunate if someone had broken the lid. I unlocked the instrument and said good-bye once more while I slid my hand lovingly over the wood. The house felt strangely empty. But I could not stay. Back to the station where the wagons wait, where my children wait.

I sit down by my dear children, who have so little understanding of what is going on or what it means to lose one's home. We start out slowly. The heavily loaded farm wagons groan under the weight of several families. The sun rises higher, the dust whirls in the air. For a long time our tear-filled eyes gaze at the village. There lies our beloved hometown, so peaceful and quiet, as if it wants to say, "Please, don't leave me behind alone. Life was so pleasant within these walls." But the village disappears behind the horizon. Farewell, dear Adelsheim! Dear homeland, though we may be far away, we will always think of you.

October 25 . . . We have lived through another long night and are still here at the railway station. This morning our train cars actually arrived. Even though they are coal cars, open at the top, they are not as cold as sitting on the ground. With everyone and their belongings inside, the cars are very full, and we are tightly cramped. But we can't leave as yet, for we are waiting for some more refugees and we have to stay here another night. We are told this is the last transport train.

November 8 . . . We are still traveling through Poland, a country which has no end. Last night it froze considerably, and our feet haven't gotten warm all day. On top of that we can't cook any food because the train hasn't stopped. Other than the flour soup we received in Lemberg we have had no provisions. The children beg for food all day. We have been told we will soon be there—perhaps by evening. I can't see us spending another night in the train. Our bedding is wet and cold from yesterday. Perhaps we will get some soup. If only we were given some kind of dry shelter, even if only a barn or a shed. We are completely exhausted, hungry, and chilled through. We long for rest and room to stretch our arms and legs. I am very weary and my knees ache from arthritis. How long have we been sitting in this fashion among our belongings? Who would have believed that we would travel in open cars in freezing temperatures? The water outside is frozen solid, whereas formerly our grandmother was accustomed to sitting in a warm easy chair. I have thought often of the words, "Pray that your flight may not be in winter."

On January 17, 1945, we received the sudden order to pack up again, for danger was near. They had waited too long to notify us. Women and children were to travel by train and the men in the trek. Suddenly the Russians broke through the front, so that flight by rail was out of the question. The railway stations were being shelled, for the Russians were only a few kilometers away. All telephone communications

were cut off, and everyone lost his head.

When darkness fell, the road was overrun with fleeing military personnel, so that we poor refugees had no chance. So we and a few others stood nearly the whole night. The wind blew icy cold. How I froze that night. Tired and without strength, I clung to the back of the wagon. Each moment I wanted to sink to my knees. Fear gripped my entire body. Fire flashed out of the dark night behind us from the front and before us from the air attack. As morning dawned our trek got moving again. So we drove through Pabianitz early in the morning. But what a sight confronted us! The whole street was terribly disrupted: before us were shelled houses, military automobiles, dead soldiers, and refugees, whose wagons were stalled. Dead horses, chests, and bicycles were strewn about. Fear and dread overwhelmed us.

Inwardly we cried, "Keep going, keep going." At the same time the first dive bombers were over us. We left the wagons standing and threw ourselves into the trenches in the streets. The bombers' deadly weapons exploded over us and their bombs shrieked. After they had left, we drove as quickly as possible to Lask. But the dive bombers didn't go away and attacked us five times that day. Each time we lay down in the forest or crawled into trenches on the road. The machine guns crackled so close that at each moment we were sure we would be killed. How we prayed. And God heard us. We were not harmed. We and the poor children lived through much terror that day. Our little one begged repeatedly, "Don't leave me on the wagon when you run away!" The air attacks came so suddenly that we hardly had time to jump out. By evening we had left behind a dangerous stretch. . . . (From Anna Falk Loewen, "A Flight in Winter," in *Women Among the Brethren*, edited by Katie Funk Wiebe, copyright © 1979 by the Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Hillsboro, Kans., pp. 160-162. Used by permission.)

The Mennonites in the North American context

As North America became the home for more and more Mennonites, what were some of the points of tension that developed in the North American culture? For most immigrant Mennonites, North America was the type of home that they had been looking for. Many were willing to adapt to the new culture and learn the ways of the

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Following the German occupation of the Ukraine in World War II, many Mennonites were forced to flee out of Russia with the retreating German army. Their flight in winter was a dramatic episode in Mennonite history.

new world. The issues of language, education, and theology, however, at times created concern.

1. Language

The transition from the German to the English language in the Mennonite churches of North America is all but complete. The transition has not always been smooth since some Mennonite people believed the loss of the mother tongue would mean the total assimilation of the Mennonites into North American culture. This was particularly true of the Russian Mennonites who had come to identify the German language with their religion. While most Swiss Mennonites saw the transition completed quite early without a great deal of difficulty, for the



Mennonites with the Russian history the transition was sometimes very painful and caused several church divisions. One of the main reasons for establishing private schools was an attempt to preserve the language and the faith.

The transition from German to English, however, continued on relentlessly. While in Russia, after one hundred years, only 1 percent of the Mennonites had registered themselves as Russian speaking, here in North America, after one hundred years for some and only fifty for others, the transition to English is nearly complete.

2. Education

The question of how to deal with the educational institutions of the state has been a complex problem for Mennonites in North America. The separate educational activity by the Mennonites in North America began with the first settlement in

1683 in Germantown and has continued throughout the centuries. The Mennonites who settled in the new world were well aware of the power of education. They saw it as a key to the future of both their German language and nonresistant faith. Many felt church control over education was essential. Concerned that the public school system often reflected the values of a non-Christian, highly nationalistic society, the Mennonite leaders sought to establish private schools at the various levels of the educational process. Today there continues to be a strong interest in Mennonite private schools. Some Mennonites continue to see them as essential to preserve the Mennonite identity in a culture which seeks to assimilate everyone.

The most serious conflict between the state and the Mennonite church on the issue of education came in the early twentieth century in Manitoba. Threatened by the loss of control over education,

the Mennonites in Manitoba banded together and sent their leaders to meet with the premier of Manitoba. They placed before him the high value that Mennonites put on the education of their own children. Mennonites, they argued, were responsible to God only on this matter, and outsiders should not attempt to establish the nature of the education of their children. Unable to convince the government officials, many of the conservative Old Colonists resorted to emigration, this time to Latin America.

3. Theology

We have seen that the Mennonite church began because the Anabaptists did not agree with the religious interpretations of their day. They sought to return to what they believed had been the proclamation of the early church about the call of Christ. The interpretation that the Anabaptists developed was unique in the Reformation setting. It was severely tested by persecution and has been under pressure throughout the existence of the Mennonite church. How has it fared in the North American context?

The question of whether the Mennonite church still embodies the unique interpretation of the Anabaptists will receive further attention in Lesson XIII. Here we wish to note that even though the Mennonite church has grown, many sons and daughters of Menno have left the Mennonite church. There are also churches which once were Mennonite but are now part of the mainstream of North American Protestantism. Radio and television preachers have often been the means by which Mennonite people have been exposed to fundamentalist Christianity. This theology has tended to place a greater emphasis on the initial acceptance

of the free grace of God in becoming a Christian and neglected an emphasis on the life of discipleship, of following Jesus. Initial forgiveness of sin has been stressed, but Christian social responsibility sometimes ignored. As we have seen elsewhere, for the Anabaptists, discipleship was believed to be at the heart of the New Testament Christian commitment. Fundamentalist Christianity has also tended to be very nationalistic and has called into question some of the long-standing Mennonite beliefs in nonresistance. (Attitudes on capital punishment are a good example of this.)

In recent years the Mennonite church in North America has become more able to verbalize the uniqueness of its theology. The higher levels of education that have been developed on this continent have nurtured men and women who are able to explain Mennonite theology to the rest of society. As a result, Anabaptist theology has gained universal respect and has been able to take its place alongside other classical interpretations like the Lutheran, Catholic, and Baptist.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

1. How important do you think language is to preserve a culture?
2. Do you agree that private schools are necessary to preserve the Mennonite faith?
3. Should we be concerned about preserving the unique Anabaptist views and, if so, for what purpose?
4. What are some of the things which attract people to radio and television preachers?

The Mennonites of North America

48

How many different types of Mennonite churches are there in your community? If you live in an area highly populated by Mennonites, you may know of a dozen or more different Mennonite groups. Where do all these different groups come from? This lesson cannot answer that question completely, but it will try to tell the story of the origins of three major groups of Mennonites in North America: the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Church, and the Mennonite Brethren Church.

The General Conference Mennonite Church

The General Conference Mennonite Church, as an organization, was founded in North America. It came about as the result of several different groups desiring a greater unity among American Mennonites in doing the work of the church. To overcome their spiritual and geographical isolation a congregation from West Point, Iowa, and one from Franklin Township formed the German Evangelical Mennonite Congregation. They decided in 1859 to work more closely together in home and foreign missions and to invite other Mennonite churches to join their union. This invitation came to the attention of John H. Oberholtzer and the East Pennsylvania Conference.

1. John Oberholtzer and the East Pennsylvania Conference

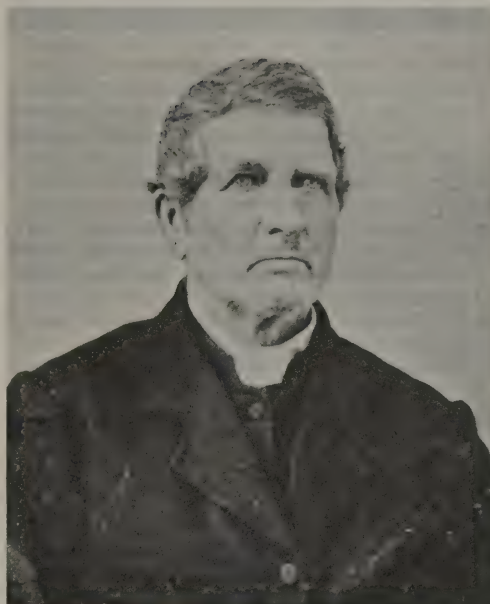
John Oberholtzer was born in 1809 in Berks County, Pennsylvania. His great-grandfather had come from Switzerland in 1732. John had received the best education available to a farm boy and was a teacher by the time he was sixteen years old. Since school was in session only during the winter months and pay was poor, he also learned the locksmith trade to support himself and his family. At age thirty-three John became a minister. C. J. Dyck describes his call to the ministry in this way:

The minister of the Great Swamp church was over eighty years old by the time John was thirty-three, and needed help. In those days congregations usually had several ministers. They served part-time, and without pay. To find a new minister the churches used the lot. The congregation would write the names of persons they believed would make good ministers on a piece of paper and hand it in to the leading minister or bishop. At a special meeting the bishop would then call the men who had been nominated to come forward and pick up one Bible from the row of Bibles he had placed on a front bench. There were always just as many Bibles as men nominated, but one had a slip in it which usually said, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord." This was a quote from Proverbs 16:33. The person who picked up the Bible with the slip in it was the new minister. It was believed that God himself was able to choose the right man in that way.

One day Samuel Musselman, the old minister of John's church, asked the members to write down names of men they wished to nominate for the ministry. Fifteen names were handed in, John's among them. . . . On the appointed day the men came forward to choose their Bibles. When John opened his, the lot was in it. It would have been almost impossible to refuse it because the church believed this was God himself calling him to service. So John became a minister in the Franconia Conference. (From *Twelve Becoming*, by C. J. Dyck, copyright © 1972 by Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kans., p. 40.)

2. A conference is born

Oberholtzer's enthusiasm and new ideas in the ministry were not always appreciated by everyone in the church. Many bad feelings developed over several issues. Eventually, in 1847, fourteen congregations under his leadership separated from the Franconia Conference and met to form a new organization which they called the East Pennsylva-



John Oberholtzer

nia Conference of the Mennonite Church. They became known as the "new" Mennonites to distinguish them from the "old" Mennonites.

One day early in 1860 Oberholtzer received for publication in the *Volksblatt* the minutes of a conference three congregations in Iowa had held the year before. Included in the minutes was an invitation to all others who might be interested to attend the next meeting on "the second day of Pentecost in 1860 at West Point (Iowa)." John did not have the money to go, but at the last minute friends raised enough, and he went.

It was a small conference. Only four visitors came. One of them was John. Five sermons were preached before they turned to business, but the things they then discussed made him deeply grateful. They had five concerns. First, the need to form a missionary society; second, the need to form a historical society to help them understand themselves; third, the need for a Christian school to train missionaries and church workers; and fourth, the need for more tracts for evangelism on city streets.

The fifth concern was for unity. "How can we as Mennonite churches work together and yet each keep our freedom?" they asked. A committee was appointed to develop a plan of union,

and when it reported next day the plan was adopted. The congregations agreed to work together in missions and education without destroying the freedom of any one of them to do things on their own. And so here, in a little town in Iowa, with only a small number of churches represented, the General Conference Mennonite Church was born. It was simply a decision of the churches represented to work together in the things they knew God wanted them to do. John was elected chairman of the new conference. He returned home with a grateful heart. (*Twelve Becoming*, pp. 46-47.)

Questions for review and discussion:

1. What was the German Evangelical Mennonite Church?
2. What were the five major concerns raised by the new conference?
3. Oberholtzer himself had led a group of churches away from the mother Franconia Conference. Research the events that led to this division, or have your teacher present this information.

The Mennonite Brethren Church

At the same time that the General Conference Mennonite Church was being formed in North America, another movement of reform was under way in Russia that led to the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church. In a previous lesson on the Mennonites in Russia we saw how the ownership of land had become a major problem for the Mennonites. Some farmers were very wealthy and basically uncaring about those farmers who had no land and were very poor. This was only one symptom of the spiritual decay that had set in among the Mennonites in the middle of the 1800s. The problem in one sense went back to the system of privileges that the Mennonites had accepted when they came to Russia. One had to be an ethnic Mennonite to enjoy the privileges set out by the Russian government, and thus it was obviously a disadvantage to separate oneself from the Mennonite colonies and church membership. Church membership became a matter of course and a necessary step in order to benefit from the special concessions granted by the Russian authorities. Consequently, the voluntary fellowship of regenerated believers that the Anabaptists had died for was in danger. The situation was not helped by the fact

that ministers were often quite apathetic, coming from the most wealthy farmers. It is not surprising that the religious and spiritual life of the Mennonites had become severely stagnated.

In this time of spiritual apathy there continued to be some individuals calling for reform. Most of these remained within the Mennonite church of the day. However, some from the village of Gnadenfeld felt led to found a reform movement. This resulted in one of the most painful divisions that the Mennonite church has experienced.

Gnadenfeld from its beginning had been a center of vital, pietistic Christianity. In 1846 an evangelical Lutheran pastor, Eduard Wuest, was invited to speak at a missions festival, and in the next years his influence in that village was a positive one. He was a dynamic speaker; his style contrasted sharply with the more unassuming, conventional reading of sermons by the Mennonite preachers. He stressed the availability of free grace from God, the need for more sin-consciousness and more vital religious experiences.

When Wuest died in 1859 a small group of men continued to meet for regular study and prayer, and since they referred to each other as Brethren, they came to be known as the Brethren. These Brethren became more and more discouraged with the leadership of the Mennonite church, and in November 1859 they held communion separately from the larger church under the leadership of a schoolteacher, Abraham Cornelsen.

There had been no elder present, and the event created much consternation and displeasure. In 1860 the Brethren drew up a letter of secession which accused the Mennonite church of being in a state of growing corruption and its leaders of tolerating conditions of spiritual decay. The document called for complete dissociation from the decadent churches.

The elders of the Mennonite church considered the document a serious attack on them, and following a meeting on January 18, they turned it over to the civil authority in the colony, thus doing precisely what had been done to the Anabaptists: identifying the cause of the church with the cause of the state (colonial powers). There followed a long and bitter struggle with excesses on both sides. The colonial authorities tried to prevent the new group from receiving governmental recognition. This would have ended their special status in Russia. The Brethren, on the other side, came to insist on a new form of baptism, that of immersion, and a rebaptism of all who wished membership within their churches. The opportunity for reconciliation was soon lost. This division is still with us, although there are a number of schools and other programs where there is cooperation.

Questions for review and discussion:

1. Discuss the statement that the Mennonite Brethren Church wanted to reestablish the church on the basis of rebirth, and not be based on birth like it had come to be.
2. What was the role of Eduard Wuest in the Mennonite Brethren movement?
3. Explain how the method used by the elders in dealing with the religious dissenters was similar to the ones used by the state church against the dissenting Anabaptists.
4. What might have been a more effective way of dealing with the division?
5. What are some of the characteristics of the Mennonite Brethren Church today?

The Mennonite Church

The Mennonite Church is the largest Mennonite group in North America. Mennonite congregations from the beginning organized into district conferences, such as the Franconia Conference of Mennonites or the Ontario Conference of Mennonites. Prior to the 1860s no attempt was made to bring a unified structure to these bodies. The name "Old Mennonite" was used to distinguish these Mennonites from the "new Mennonites" who helped establish the General Conference Mennonite Church. In 1898 a new denominational structure came into being for the church, called the Mennonite General Conference, somewhat parallel to the General Conference Mennonite Church structure based in Newton, Kansas. The name "Mennonite Church" became its official designation in 1971.

1. Early Leaders of the Mennonite Church

The Mennonite Church has seen several strong and influential leaders. John S. Coffmann was a pioneer evangelist and chief promoter of what came to be Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana; Harold S. Bender was the outstanding scholar-leader of this century. The great organizer of the church was John F. Funk.

John Fretz Funk, 1835-1930

The most important figure in the life of the (Old) Mennonites in the nineteenth century was John F. Funk. Born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, he took summer courses at Freeland Seminary (now Ursinus College), and taught school three years. In 1857 he moved to Chicago and entered the

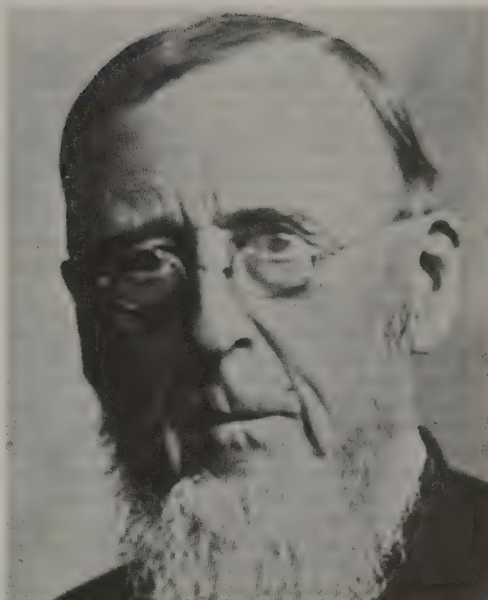
lumber business, working first with his brother-in-law, Jacob Beidler, and soon going into business for himself but with a partner. Converted in 1858 under Presbyterian influence, he returned to his home church, Line Lexington in Bucks County, and was baptized a year later. In 1864 he started the first successful church periodical of the (Old) Mennonites, the English *Herald of Truth*, and its German twin, the *Herold der Wahrheit*. That same year, 1864, he also married his second cousin, Salome Kratz (d. 1917), one of his former pupils. They had six children, four of whom died in childhood. In 1865 Funk was attending the services of a small Mennonite congregation in a schoolhouse near Gardner in Grundy County, Illinois. There John M. Brenneman ordained him to the ministry. Two years later Funk, then thirty-two, sold out his lumber business in Chicago and established his home and a printing business in Elkhart, Indiana. Here he lived the remaining sixty-two years of his life, dying in his ninety-fifth year.

Funk started the publication work of his denomination, first as an individual, then in partnership with his brother Abraham, and finally as the Mennonite Publishing Company in 1875. In 1908 he sold his periodicals to the young Mennonite Publication Board which had its publishing house at Scottdale, Pennsylvania.

Funk also had a vision for building up the spiritual life of his denomination through Sunday schools. He had been an ardent Sunday school worker for D. L. Moody in Chicago and knew the value of the Sunday school. Indeed, he had regularly attended three Sunday schools in Chicago: as a pupil in one, as a teacher in a second, and as the superintendent of a third! By personal urging and by public appeals through his *Herald of Truth*, Funk was a leading figure in helping the (Old) Mennonites to establish Sunday schools throughout his church from east to west, largely in the period of 1865-95.

As early as 1882 Funk led the Indiana Conference to set up an Evangelizing Fund to send preachers to neglected communities and members. This fund was administered by an Evangelizing Committee which ultimately developed into the general mission board of the (Old) Mennonites, the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities.

Funk also felt that it would be a help to the unity of the (Old) Mennonite Church to create a General Conference. Consequently he mailed from his Publishing company office a letter to the ministers of the church asking for their reaction to the plan of setting up a General Conference. The response was favorable, a number of district



John F. Funk

conferences appointed representatives to do the initial planning, a number of committee meetings were held, a preliminary meeting was held at the Pike meetinghouse, Elida, Ohio, in 1897, and at the first regular session of the Mennonite General Conference in 1898, Funk preached the conference sermon.

No one can estimate the influence of John Fretz Funk on the (Old) Mennonite Church. (From *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, edited by C. J. Dyck, copyright © 1967 by Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa., pp. 170-171. Used by permission.)

2. The Mennonite Church today

In the report for the Tenth World Conference of Mennonites, Leonard Gross drew attention to the following changes in the Mennonite Church:

Throughout the nineteenth century members of the Mennonite Church were bilingual, with German as the main language. By about 1890 English began slowly displacing the German. After 1890 the spirit of revivalism and the outreach of the Western world had renewed Mennonite interests in urban as well as overseas missions. Higher education began about this time with the founding of Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, in 1894, followed soon by

Hesston College, Hesston, Kansas, and Eastern Mennonite College, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

From the 1890s to about 1950, a cultural conservatism developed which set the Mennonites apart culturally, in dress and other customs, from their contemporaries. Such had not been the case earlier—when simplicity in dress and life meant not going to extremes rather than wearing a peculiar garb. Both fundamentalism and liberalism also affected the church during these decades. A major Mennonite institution, Goshen College, was closed for a year in the thick of controversy and suspicion.

The change from the German to the English language, and the acceptance of many new ideas eroded the strong sense of continuity with the mainstream of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition to the point that Mennonites were in danger of losing their historical rootedness. Hence, the new quest for roots, begun in the 1920s at Goshen College (Indiana), perhaps best depicted in the book title, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Guy F. Hershberger, ed., Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1957), was a necessary counterbalance in maintaining a Mennonite identity.

Since the World War II era, the once-rural Mennonites have become increasingly urbanized. The violence and upheavals of the 1960s throughout the Western world affected Mennonitism, as well as all other segments of North American society. The traditional stand of nonresistance was thoroughly tested, and this

time emerged with a substantial transformation which took into account the modern complexities of an urbanized society. The world was again a place in which the Mennonite Church found itself involved. Some felt that the Mennonite Church had not only entered the world but in a very real sense had taken on the essence of the world. But there are real signs of strength during the 1970s which suggest that what is emerging is a new kind of biblical nonconformity to the world rather than a selling out of those central ideas and realities which had defined the Mennonite Church for over four centuries. Community is still central in the thought of a large core of Mennonites, as is the affirmation of Christian discipleship and service, based upon Christian love and peace. (From *Mennonite World Handbook*, edited by Paul N. Kraybill, copyright © 1978 by Mennonite World Conference, Lombard, Ill., p. 359. Used by permission.)

Questions for review and discussion:

1. What were some of the contributions of John F. Funk?
2. When was the Mennonite Church organized into a conference?
3. What are some of the characteristics of the Mennonite Church today?

Amish, Hutterites, Old Colonists: The Separate Way

In the last lesson we looked at some of the Mennonite groups that have banded together to form conferences. This session will concentrate on three of the groups that have heavily emphasized one of the major themes of the early Anabaptists, separation from the world.

The Hutterites

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The Hutterite story begins in the time of the early persecution of the Anabaptists. It was under this severe persecution of the Hapsburg rule of the Holy Roman Empire that the Hutterite identity took form. In this time of persecution, Moravia became a refuge for many fleeing Anabaptists. The Moravian nobles had a long-standing tradition of relative

A group of Hutterite young people from the Jamesville colony in South Dakota.

Willard H. Walther



religious freedom. Moravia had experienced religious dissension already a century earlier in pre-Protestant uprisings like the one led by John Huss. Because of the greater religious toleration, Nicolsburg, the major centre, was populated by about 12,000 Anabaptists by 1527.

The prominent Anabaptist leaders Balthasar Hubmaier and Hans Hut both spent time in Moravia, giving leadership to these Anabaptists. Hubmaier and Hut became involved in a debate over the extent to which the Anabaptists should carry their nonresistance. Hut was much less willing to support the sympathetic political rulers by paying a war tax to them. Hut had also joined the group of Anabaptists that insisted on a radical sharing of material goods.

When the Turks began to penetrate the Hapsburg territories, a number of Anabaptist families left Nicolsburg. Historical records offer two explanations: they left because they did not wish to be protected by the military force of the nobleman Leonhard von Liechtenstein who refused to expose the Anabaptists to the imperial government, or, in contradiction to the first explanation, they were asked to leave by the nobleman because of the religious dissension within the group.

The *Hutterite Chronicle* records the historic occasion when, in 1528, the "community of goods" was launched by Jakob Wiedemann and his followers on leaving the town of Nicolsburg. A coat was spread out and the material possessions of the group of two hundred were pooled into a common treasury. This communal group was eventually able to find refuge in Austerlitz.

Jacob Hutter became the most important leader of this group of Anabaptists. Until 1533 Hutter was the pastor in Tyrol, but he was called upon several times to settle the tensions created by contending leaders within the communal group. Eventually he felt called by God to provide leadership to the fragmented group. Although his leadership lasted only a short time, he succeeded in building an economically durable and socially cohesive Bruderhof. Hutter was captured in 1535 and, after severe torture, was burned at the stake in early 1536.

A "golden period" was experienced by the Hutterites in Moravia from 1555 to 1595. During this time the Moravian nobles were strong, and they protected their local autonomy jealously. Hutterite culture flourished within their territories. In the 1590s, however, war and counterreformation shook the Hutterite colonies to the core and eventually led to the total expulsion of the Hutterites from Moravia. The Hutterites once again faced inhuman persecution. The *Hutterite Chronicle* records these terrors:

It is impossible to write or tell of all the great and inhuman cruelties which came upon us and others in this ungodly, accursed and devilish war at the hands of the . . . imperial forces. . . . Women with child and mothers in childbed as well as virgins were shamelessly attacked. The men were burned with glowing iron and red-hot pans; their feet were held in the fire until the toes were burned off; wounds were cut into which powder was poured and then set afire; fingers and ears were cut off, eyes forced out by inhuman tortures on the wheel; men were hung up by the neck like thieves; all sorts of such brutality and unheard of godlessness were committed, half of which is not to be written for shame. (John A. Hostetter, *Hutterite Society*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 64.)

Many of the Hutterites in the next years surrendered to the Catholic Jesuits. One colony from Transylvania was able to migrate to the Ukraine in 1767. From there the Hutterites moved to the United States with the Mennonites in the 1870s. The Hutterites soon prospered in the United States. By 1917 there were seventeen colonies, with a population of about seventeen hundred. With the outbreak of World War I, American tolerance was cut off. Hutterites were harassed and abused. Two conscientious objectors died as a result of the rough treatment suffered in prison at Alcatraz and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Within two years of this event most Hutterites had moved north to Canada. They were not always met with open arms by Canadian citizens either. The editor of one Calgary newspaper referred to the Hutterites as "a bunch of German cattle" coming across into Canada.

Throughout their history, Hutterites have held that communal life is essential in order to realize the kingdom that is ruled by the Spirit of Christ. Communal life, they believe, is rooted in God's will.

Hutterites speak of themselves as "the Community of all Believers" and as "the only true Communists in the world" who could not possibly share with each other in their communal life if they were not dedicated to God and under religious obedience to follow Christ's commands as recorded in the Bible. They believe that they are a fellowship of those who are ready to "give all" and "forsake all" in their devotion to the service of Jesus Christ. Hutterites do not want most of the privileges of the modern state—old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, government welfare, or the right to vote and to hold public office. Above all they do not want to be assimilated and to become an indistinguishable part of a homogeneous nation. They are not missionary-minded and do not aggressively seek converts. But they believe that they are meant to

serve as a Christian "beacon on a hill" and they offer a welcome to all who search for "God's peace." To do this they have steadfastly sought to preserve their cultural and religious uniqueness through hundreds of years of persecution in many places. (From David Flint, *A Study of Prejudice*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. vii-viii.)

Questions for further discussion:

1. Discuss some of the ways in which Hutterites maintain a separateness from the rest of the world.
2. What things do you find attractive about the communal life of the Hutterites?
3. What are your feelings about the Hutterite claim that the communal life is essential for a Christian community?

The Amish

The Amish, who take their name from Jacob Ammann, are the descendants of a group of dissenters from the Swiss Anabaptists in 1693. Although Ammann was younger than his main opponent, a mild-mannered preacher in the Canton of Bern, he called for a much more severe discipline in overcoming evil among church members. Ammann felt that the call of the Schleithem Confession to be separate from the world should be more strictly enforced. He strongly stressed nonconformity to social customs and taught that it was wrong to trim the beard and wear fashionable clothing. Members who were excommunicated were to be avoided. Church members should avoid eating with banned persons, avoid doing business with them, and break off all social fellowship.

Ammann sought to gain support for his severe policy of shunning. He began to excommunicate all those who refused to agree with him. The dissension became very bitter and soon spread to the wider Anabaptist community.

Amish settlers came to Pennsylvania from Switzerland as early as 1727. (The distinction between the Amish and the Mennonites has long since disappeared in Europe.) In the next years, migrations further west and into Ontario took place, as did new emigration from Europe.

Amish life in North America has been characterized by a clear witness to the sinfulness of the world. In this the Amish have given one of the primary beliefs of the Anabaptists a unique

Vincent Tortora



Amish children are dressed as nearly as possible like their parents.

interpretation. The Anabaptists, too, separated the church and the world. The Anabaptists did not accept the idea that Europe was Christian just because everyone was a baptized member of the church. For the Anabaptists, to be a Christian meant to be committed to New Testament living. They believed that both society and state were under the domination of the forces of evil, and the church should separate itself from it. The Amish developed these Anabaptist views further into a doctrine of nonconformity.

Question for discussion:

Notice how the Amish make use of excommunication and shunning. Why does this practice often accompany groups who want to be separate?

The Amish practice mutual aid and sharing in very practical ways. Here the men are helping to build a barn for one of their members who has perhaps lost his barn in a fire.



The Old Colony Mennonites

Earlier we noted that many of the Mennonites who came to North America from Russia in the nineteenth century settled in Manitoba. A large group of these were from the Chortitza colony, also known as the Old Colony, since it was the first colony in Russia. By choosing the isolation of Manitoba, these Mennonites had already indicated their conservative leanings. Their desire was to remain separate from North American society.

The Old Colony church has through the years attempted to uphold the early Anabaptist theme of being separate from the world. However, while in the early Anabaptist understanding, the separate people of God were not an ethnic group, but the redeemed who had committed themselves to live their lives after the example of Jesus, the Old Colonists came to identify the separate people of God with their ethnic, cultural group. The Old Colonists' whole way of life has revolved around the belief that they are part of the separate people of God. It has meant that they must not become entangled in this world. It has determined many of their attitudes and actions. Occupation, manner of settlement, family life, education, and church structure have all been greatly influenced by the separatist philosophy.

When the Mennonites came to Manitoba from Russia, they settled in villages as they had known them in Russia. These villages consisted of farms on either side of the road with pasture lands behind

Old Colony Mennonite children in their school in west Texas. Old Colony Mennonites from Mexico have recently purchased land west of the town of Seminole, but their stay has been marked by threats of deportation.



them. The village layout and the architecture of the buildings, such as the adjoining house and barn, show an ordered way of life and indicate a conformity to certain accepted norms. The closeness of a village setting was believed to contribute to the emergence of a self-conscious identity. It induced togetherness and conformity and thereby helped the Mennonites to remain separate from the world. Old Colony leaders strongly resisted the breakdown of the village system because they saw it as a threat to their emphasis on being separate from the world.

Control over education has been seen as one of the highest priorities by Old Colony leadership in preserving its sense of separateness. The Mennonites came to Manitoba with the understanding that they might educate their children "without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever." They found out later that this promise could not be upheld by the constitution of Canada. When the Manitoba government became involved in the area of education, it was met by the full opposition of the Old Colony leadership. The conservative Mennonites believed that church and parents had the responsibility of educating the children.

When it seemed in 1890 that the Manitoba School Act, together with a few other issues, would destroy the separateness of the Mennonites as they had known it, the Old Colonists began to move westward. However, in Saskatchewan, as in Manitoba, the government was not able to convince the Mennonites to accept its control over their education. They finally resorted to the courts. Parents who failed to show valid cause for their children not attending a recognized school were fined and, in a few cases, imprisoned. Some Mennonites paid a high price to maintain their sense of separateness in the area of education.

Eventually many of the Old Colonists reached the conclusion that they would once more have to emigrate to maintain the level of separateness that they desired. Fearing that in the end the pressures of North American assimilation would win over their heritage, many groups left Canada for Mexico, Bolivia, Paraguay, and other South American countries. Some Old Colonists, however, remain in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

Questions for discussion:

1. What did the Old Colonists mean by "separation from the world"?
2. Why was public education fought so strongly by Old Colonists?



Conscientious objectors at an army camp in Fort Riley, Kansas, in 1918. During World War I conscientious objectors were frequently harassed and mistreated.

Pacifism in Mennonite History

The conviction of pacifism sets the Mennonite church apart from many other Christian churches. The Mennonite church is one of the few historic peace churches, having emphasized from the beginning and throughout its history the need to take seriously Christ's admonition to love even one's enemies. This lesson will deal with some of the stories and teachings about pacifism.

Following Jesus

What is the root of pacifism? How has it been maintained throughout history? At the heart of Anabaptism is the concept of following Jesus as described in this classic statement by H. S. Bender:

First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship. It was a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ. The Anabaptists could not understand a Christianity which made regeneration, holiness, and love primarily a matter of intellect, of doctrinal belief, or of subjective "experience," rather than one of the transformation of life. They demanded an outward expression of the inner experience. Repentance must be "evidenced" by newness of behavior. "In evidence" is the keynote which rings through the testimonies and challenges of the early Swiss Brethren when they are called to give an account of themselves. The whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ in a covenant of discipleship, a covenant which the Anabaptist writers delighted to emphasize. The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships. The true test of the Christian, they held, is discipleship. The great word of the Anabaptists was not "faith" as it was with the

reformers, but "following" (*Nachfolge Christi*). (From Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, edited by G. F. Hershberger, copyright © 1957 by Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pa., pp. 42-43. Used by permission.)

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Questions for review and discussion:

1. Explain what the Anabaptists meant by discipleship.
2. What is the difference between emphasizing "faith" and emphasizing "following"?

Pacifism in Mennonite history

1. Early Anabaptists

Many statements advocating pacifism can be found among the early Anabaptists. Fighting and killing was believed to be contrary to the way of love. To be a Christian and to follow Jesus meant being nonresistant.

Michael Sattler was charged, among other things with being sympathetic to the enemy, the Turks. In his defense he replied, "If the Turks would come, we ought not to resist them; for it is written: Thou shalt not kill. We must not defend ourselves against the Turks and others of our persecutors, but are to beseech God with earnest prayer to repel and resist them." (*Martyrs' Mirror*, p. 417.)

Conrad Grebel made the statement: "True Christians use neither worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely, for we are no longer under the Old Covenant. . . . The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, neither should they thus protect themselves." (Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," p. 51.)

Peter Riedemann, the Hutterian leader, wrote in 1554: "Christ, the Prince of Peace, has established

A Mennonite Selbstschutz (self-defense) unit in Russia during the Russian Revolution. These units were often trained by German officers.



Mennonite Library and Archives

His Kingdom that is, His Church, and has purchased it by His blood. In this Kingdom all worldly warfare has ended. Therefore a Christian has no part in war nor does he wield the sword to execute vengeance." (Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," p. 51.)

Menno Simons writes, "The regenerated do not go to war nor fight. They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and know no war. They give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Their sword is the word of the Spirit which they wield with a good conscience through the Holy Ghost. . . . Peter was commanded to put his sword into the sheath. All Christians are bidden to love their enemies, do good to those who do them evil, and pray for those who abuse and persecute them; to give the cloak also if any one sue them at law for the coat; if they are stricken on the right cheek to turn to him who abuses them the other also. Say, beloved, how can a Christian, according to the Scriptures, consistently retaliate, rebel, war, murder, slay, torture, steal, rob, and burn cities and conquer countries?" (*Menno Simons: Life and Writings*, pp. 90-91.)

2. During the Russian Revolution

The Mennonite peace principle has perhaps never been as seriously tested as it was in Russia. There the classic question that comes up in debates on nonresistance, "If someone came into your home and threatened your wife and family, would you not resist?" was not a theoretical situation but was a reality. What would be the Mennonite response in the midst of plundering, raping, and killing? Mennonite pacifism had not been tested for almost a century and for many had become only a part of the social and cultural trappings of

Mennonite life.

Although most Mennonite men remained true to the 400-year-old confession of pacifism, some found the level of terror beyond their endurance. When faced by wanton killing and physical abuse, some of them banded together and formed an organization known as the *Selbstschutz* (Self-Defense Unit). After the first stage of terror the colonies were occupied by the German forces who brought temporary relief. Some of the Mennonite youth were attracted to the militarism of the German troops, and with the withdrawal of the German troops and the spectre of another reign of terror over their heads, the Self-Defense Unit won enough support to enable it to organize into several groups.

Meanwhile, the betrayal of the pacifism of the forefathers did not go unchallenged. Pleas for moderation and repentance were heard from the pulpits and from certain courageous villagers. An All-Mennonite Conference was held in Lichtenau, Molotschna, in 1918 to deal with the upsurge of militarism. The challenge of the Self-Defense Unit proved too great for the pacifists. The Conference did agree that the belief in nonresistance was the Christian ideal, but it also advocated the right of private interpretation concerning nonresistance and tolerance for individual members not accepting nonresistance.

Inevitably the Self-Defense Unit became associated with the White Army in its war against the Reds, and thus, in the eyes of the Bolshevik regime, the entire Mennonite constituency in the south was implicated as a counter-revolutionary element. Often this meant only further hardship for the nonresistant villagers. In the village of Blumenort a Self-Defense Unit, against the protest of the

villagers, attacked a small group of invaders. Two of the bandits escaped and the next day returned with an armed troop to punish the village. Pleas of innocence were ignored, and any villager in sight was executed. The Self-Defense Unit, as was often the case, was not only unable to provide protection but had only inspired further violence and revenge.

Question for review and discussion

Which side of the debate would you have been on at the All-Mennonite Conference in Lichtenau?

Conscientious objection in North America

Mennonites in North America have had to face the question of involvement in the military several times. In the United States the question has come up with regard to the War of Independence, the Civil War, the two World Wars, and the practice of conscription after World War II, especially during the Viet Nam War. In Canada young men have faced conscription during the World Wars. The following are two examples of how Mennonite young men dealt with conscription.

1. Ura V. Aschliman

Ura Aschliman was among the Mennonite conscientious objectors of World War I who was imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth for refusing military duties. The following is a portion of the official trial record.

(4203820) COURT MARTIAL 1918

PVT. URA V. ASCHLIMAN

DIRECT EXAMINATION

Defense: Aschliman, did you recognize the officer who testified in here a while ago, as your commander, some time ago, as your company commander while you were in the Depot Brigade?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you remember him giving you an order which you did not obey?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. What was that order?

A. He told me to go to the kitchen, and I said that I could not conscientiously go on account of my religious belief.

Q. What are your religious beliefs, Aschliman?

A. My belief, according to the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, is that it is wrong for me to take part in carnal warfare.

CROSS EXAMINATION

Judge Advocate: What church do you belong to?

A. Well, I have been going to the Amish Mennonite Church all my life, but I have not yet been made a member. I just neglected it.

Q. When did you first decide you wanted to be a member of the Amish Mennonite Church?

A. Well, on the 1st day of May.

Q. Of this year?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. 1918?

A. Yes.

Q. When were you drafted?

A. 13th May I left the County seat.

Q. Were you inducted into the service May 18th?

A. Yes.

Q. When did you draw your draft number, when was your number published?

A. I could not say as to that.

Q. When did you first know that you were apt to be called in service?

A. Just a few days before I left.

Q. You read the newspaper, don't you?

A. A little, not very much.

Q. You knew that they were calling young men into the army for some time before that?

A. Yes.

Q. You knew you were liable to the draft?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And you did not decide to become a member of the church until about 13 days before you were actually inducted into the service; in other words, that was after you knew that you were going to be put into the service, wasn't it?

A. No, I did not figure about the service at all; that was the time Christ called me, and that was the time for me to listen.

Q. Christ's voice was not very loud, but you knew that there was some danger in your going into the service—you did not hear that call before?

A. Yes, sir, I heard it before, but I put it off.

Q. Why does going to work in the kitchen have anything to do with carnal warfare?

A. Because if I do that I am bearing the noncombatant's end of an organized effort to take human life and destroy and overcome the enemy by means of violence, which is a service that non-resisting people cannot do.

Q. You would not go out and help the wounded—what?—would you or wouldn't?

A. Wherever we can, that is not considered under Military Service.

Q. Would you work in the hospital to help the sick?

- A. No, I could not do it, because I would be bearing the noncombatant end.
- Q. You would consider it a sin to minister to people who are suffering, wounded and in pain?
- A. Where that is considered under the Military Service it is against my religion.
- Q. You consider it a sin to go out and clean up the company street?
- A. Yes, for me it is.
- Q. Why?
- A. Because I am bearing the noncombatant end of an organized effort to take human life and overcome the enemy by violence which nonresisting people cannot do.
- Q. Wouldn't you fight to protect your home?
- A. No, sir.
- Q. To protect your mother?
- A. No, sir.
- Q. If a man attempted to rape your mother wouldn't you fight?
- A. No.
- Q. You would permit to have that taken away from her which she probably values more than her life, without your turning your hand to prevent it?
- A. I would pray to Almighty God for help.
- Q. You would ask for a miracle, would you.
- A. I would put my trust in the Lord that he would help.
- Q. What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States, do you owe any duty towards your country as a citizen of the United States?
- A. Yes, sir.
- Q. What are those duties in time of war?
- A. For me it is to pray to Almighty God that He may rule through those whom are in authority.
- Q. Is that the duty of every citizen?
- A. I believe it is.
- Q. That is all his duty, that is all he has to do?
- A. He has to work to help the poor—
- Q. I know—but suppose an enemy wishes to invade this country, to destroy your home, your mother and yourself, suppose he will do it unless you keep him from doing it—what do you think your duty is?
- A. My duty for me is, if the enemy comes to attack my home, that I should flee rather than to give any offense.
- Q. What do you think the United States is going to do—where are the people of the United States going to flee to?
- A. I trust the Almighty God will have a way.
- Judge Advocate: I just want to say a word or two to the court in this case. The test whether or not a man shall be exempt from Military Service by

reason of religious convictions, as I understand it, is whether or not he was a member of a religious sect. It is only fair to the accused here to say that the Mennonites is one of the sects particularly designated in either an order or Act of Congress which was published some time ago. I have attempted to get hold of it for the last few days but have been unable to do so, but the Mennonites is a religious sect one of the tenets of whose belief is that it is not proper to go to war.

The main proposition involved in this case is that the accused is not a member of that church. It is very significant that he never joined this church, or openly professed belief in this creed, until about two weeks before he was inducted into the service, and after he had every reason to expect that he was going to be drafted.

As to his sincerity, that of course is for the court to pass upon. Whether he is defiant we have no testimony before us at this time; but I believe that inasmuch as he is not a member of the church, and evidently made no effort to become a member of the church until just before being called in the service, the court, properly, may consider this the governing point in this case. Defense: The defense does not wish to make any argument in this case.

The court was closed, and finds the accused:
Of the Specification: Guilty
Of the Charge: Guilty

The court was closed, and sentenced the accused to be dishonorably discharged the service (sic), to forfeit all pay and allowances due or to become due, and to be confined to hard labor at such place as the reviewing authority may direct for five years. (From *Mennonite Life*, Sept., 1976.)

2. A CO in World War II

Both Canada and United States have offered forms of alternate service to its conscientious objectors. This service has taken various forms. Sometimes it has been physical work in parks, but it has also often involved humanitarian services. Among the conscientious objectors of the last war were those who volunteered to serve in the Medical Corp or the Red Cross. Some were also able to serve with Mennonite Central Committee in places of need, as did this CO during World War II:

My first memory of the experience goes back to the initial communication from the military authorities, inviting me to report for my medical examination. This document had a rather traumatic effect on me, and produced a prolonged period of soul-searching. We had been raised in the Mennonite faith, with the emphasis on

nonresistance, that article of faith that sets the Mennonite churches apart from its sister churches. Was I going to be a conscientious objector because of tradition, or was it a matter of personal conviction? . . .

I could not reconcile Christ's gospel of love with the philosophy of animosity, hatred and brutality as it reveals itself on the field of battle. Why was I to take a life when I could not bestow a life? Was the cause of humanity greater than the cause of Christ? He had not deemed His cause worthy of bloodshed. He had commanded Peter to sheathe his sword when the latter tried to defend His cause. . . .

In part, at least, my desire to serve with the Mennonite Central Committee can be attributed to . . . (wanting) to prove to myself, and to the world, that conscientious objection need not be equated with cowardliness, and this conviction was only too soon to be put to the task.

That first night in war-torn London is indelibly etched in my memory. It was fraught with uncertainty, anxiety and fear. When bedtime came we were told to put on our pyjamas over our underwear, and the trousers and shirts over the pyjamas, put our socks on our feet and then our bathrobes over all that. The matron took us down into the basement of the house, which had been reinforced with heavy timbers and served as an air-raid shelter for the house.

The room was about eight feet wide and twice as long, and served as bedroom for eighteen persons, men, women, and children. This establishment served as the headquarters for the Mennonite Central Committee's operations in Europe, as well as a transit home for bombed-out children. The first part of the night was spent in restlessly tossing in my upper bunk close to the ceiling. The air was cold and damp; the other bunks containing the children were near by. The entire setting had an air of unreality about it.

Finally I dozed off, wrapped in my most uncomfortable night attire, when I was jerked back into reality by the uncanny wailing of what must have been hundreds of sirens. My first air-raid alert! We had gathered sufficient information to realize that these were not aircraft bombers but V-1 missiles, those self-propelled bombs launched in Holland.

I lay there in my bunk, every nerve in my body stretched tense to the breaking point, my ears straining to pick up any unfamiliar sound. There! There it was! An aircraft that tore the air in an entirely different manner from the usual planes. In my mind I saw this creature, for my imagination equipped the machine with bestial attributes, approaching. It had the configuration of

a shark with cruel, grinning teeth and small, red, pig eyes. As it came closer my body contracted until I lay there a ball of terror about six inches tall. . . .

The beast came closer, literally shredding the air. Then it turned off the motor, and those few moments of silence were much more ear-shattering than the sirens had been. Silence can be so loud! I had never known this before. I breathed a sigh of relief and gratitude, and then realized how immoral that was, for I was rejoicing because not I, but somebody else, some other of God's children had been killed, or maimed for life. I shuddered at the realization of my immorality, and was ashamed of myself. . . .

I spent several months at the home for convalescent boys in Northern England, before I was transferred to the London unit to wait for the end of the war, and a chance to serve in France

In recalling those years, I'm also reminded of the spiritual state in which I lived during those months. I was not afraid of death. If it really was the gateway to heaven, it could only open the door to a greater, freer, more glorious life with God. The teaching of the church and the home had not been in vain. Death itself held no fears for me, but what I did fear was the possibility of being injured or maimed for life. Given the choice, I would much rather have preferred death with its promises, "In the name of Christ," as the motto of MCC proclaimed. (Vernon K. Toews, from *Mennonite Memories: Settling in Western Canada*, edited by Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G. Toews, Winnipeg: Centennial Publications, 1977, pp. 272ff. Used by permission.)

Militarism in North American society today

Our generation must deal with the question of our relation to the military just like those who have gone before us. Not only do issues like the draft face us but also our attitude toward militarism in general in our society. Our attitude toward the payment of war taxes will no doubt continue to be a controversial one. Below is one response to the conference held in February 1979 to deal with the question of the payment of war taxes:

"Jonah revisited . . . unfinished" by Peter Ediger

Now the word of the Lord came to Mennonites, saying

Go to Washington and Ottawa, those great cities

At the 1980 General Conference session at Estes Park, Colorado, several young men appealed to the conference to support them in their decision not to register for the draft in the United States.

and cry against them
for their militarism has come up before me.

But Mennonites fled from the presence of the Lord,
and went to sea on the luxury-liner, Affluence.
And the Lord sent great storms on the sea
and the winds of revolution blew from across the seas
so that the ship was about to be broken.

And the citizens were afraid
and began to throw the wares of the ship into the sea.
But the Mennonites were fast asleep
in the hold of Affluence.

And the citizens came and woke them, saying
Who are you? What is your faith?
And the Mennonites said
We are children of the Prince of Peace
but we are running from the presence of the Lord.

And the citizens said
What shall we do to you
that the sea may quiet down?
And the Mennonites said,
Throw us into the sea that
the sea may quiet down
for we know it is our running
from the presence of the Lord
which brings this tempest on the sea.
So they took the Mennonites and threw them
into the sea.

And the Lord appointed a Conference
to swallow up the Mennonites
and they were in the belly of the Conference
two days and two nights.

And the Mennonites prayed to the Lord their God
from the belly of the Conference
the water closed in over us
the deep was round about us
and it wasn't clear whether they were
praying to the Lord their God or
paying regard to vain idols
as they decided to try to please
two masters.

And the Lord spoke to the Conference
and it vomited out the Mennonites back into the sea
and they were sucked again
into the hold of the ship Affluence.

And the word of the Lord came to the Mennonites
a second time saying
Arise, go to Washington and Ottawa, those great cities
and proclaim to them the message that I tell you.

And the Mennonites said
let us consult our lawyers and our legislators
to seek a way by which
we can go about our spiritual mission
while avoiding conflict with our governments
as they go about their military missions.
After three years, if our governments will not give us
their blessings,
then we will return into the belly of the Conference
and seek the Word of the Lord.

And the people of Washington and Ottawa
smiled and said
Let everyone go on unconverted
supporting our violent security systems.
Who knows, the Mennonites and their God
may yet
repent
and bless our military might.
(From *The Mennonite Reporter*, March 1979.)

Questions for review and discussion:

1. How do you respond to this reading?
2. What do you think should be the position of the Mennonite church on the issue of war-tax contributions?

The Many Faces of the Mennonite Church

We have seen in our study how the Mennonite movement began in Switzerland, the German territories, and the Netherlands as a new discovery of the meaning of the church and the role of the Christian within it. We have also seen how the descendants of the original movement, forced into separate communities by persecution, came to possess many common aspects of culture as a strong ethnic group.

One of the most exciting things that has happened to the Mennonite church in the last years has been the opening of its doors to people of other cultural backgrounds. Names that are not traditional, ethnic Mennonite names are found throughout the membership rosters of the Mennonite church. Not many years ago the language and social barriers were still too strong to allow the

mutual acceptance which now can and does take place. As the Mennonite church has become more confident in the North American environment, it has more often been able to extend a hand to those who come from a different heritage.

The "English," as they were once known, regardless of whether they were Irish or Italian, have made many valuable contributions to the Mennonite church. They have brought with them new perspectives, new gifts, and new resources. Often they have been a breath of fresh air to an ingrown community. Their very identification with the Mennonite church has called ethnic Mennonites to reevaluate their definition of the Mennonite faith. If it is not the cultural ethnic identity which makes one into a Mennonite, then what is it?

The Mennonite church has become a multina-

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One of the most exciting things that has happened to the Mennonite church in the last years has been the opening of its doors to people of other cultural backgrounds.



The Mennonite

tional church. In North America alone there are black, native North American, Chicano, Hispanic, and Chinese Mennonites. Mennonite churches can be found throughout the world. The number of nonwhite, non-European Mennonites has about reached the number of white, European Mennonites. In view of this fact, what does it mean to be a Mennonite in our time?

We cannot consider all of the new groups of Mennonites here. A few representative groups will be selected.

Black and Mennonite

The title of this section is also the title of a book written by a black Mennonite, Hubert L. Brown. In his book, Brown shares some of his experiences and thoughts as a black Mennonite.

I would like to share with you some insights on what it means to be black in the Mennonite Church and to explore the relationships of black and white Christians today. Like most blacks, I came to a knowledge of the Christian faith mostly through white people. My acquaintance with Mennonites began some twenty-five years ago. At least that's what early records of the Mennonite summer Bible school in Norristown, Pennsylvania, indicate. Having the Brown family in the Bible school was a direct result of the missionary effects of a motley-looking group of white, rural, German-background Mennonite churchmen.

I'm still struggling with the church. As I look into Mennonite Church history, I discover that the present-day Mennonite community has lost many of its historical spiritual qualities. I realize that the sons of Menno must seek to recover their spiritual past. I cannot identify with their biological past, but I must be cognizant of their ethnic experience. I must try to become acquainted with that which I cannot understand, just as I think it will be necessary for Mennonites to become aware of a black past.

Many Mennonites have begun a new ethnic awareness search. There has also been an ethnic identity search by blacks. Blacks and those Mennonites who are engaged in a pilgrimage to the past will find it to be freeing and inspirational. Black history has established an authentic past. To draw upon C. Eric Lincoln's description of our separate trips to North America, I'd say, unlike the Anabaptists who immigrated to escape from tyranny and to seek religious freedom, Africans came not by choice but because the last vestige of their freedom had been wiped out. The sons and daughters of Menno arrived in the new world seeking new ways to exploit the full

potential of their humanity, while the Africans came under conditions which denied even their basic humanity. The children of West Africa and the sons of Europe were destined for separate roles in the making of North America. For the white Mennonite, North America was to be a land of the free, where self-evident truths of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness were sufficient grounds for justice. But for the African, North America was to mean years of slavery and segregation, followed by integration and more subtle racism.

Obviously we come from two different and separate streams of history. It is important for Mennonites—whites and blacks—to know both histories. As I look back, I see a different history than of Mennonite forebears who were known as the "quiet in the land." I see how my own forefathers were forced to deny their African past. I see the internalization of slave master values. I see the insistence to affirm European values that were responsible for our enslavement. At worst, this meant accepting the slave conditions as ordained of God. At best, it meant that Shakespeare, Menno Simons, and Bach provided the standards of literary, theological, and musical creativity. That's why Malcolm X said, "The worst crime the white man has committed has been to teach us to hate ourselves."

The question I then pose is how much of the church community of which I've become a part stands for all that I deeply hate in American life? I wonder if the church has become, in the words of Bill Pannell, "my friend the enemy."

I recall a black Mennonite brother asking me if I was going to stay in the Mennonite Church. If we are serious about creating a new Christian community, a new sense of what the Anabaptist vision was all about, I told him, then I am quite serious about remaining Mennonite. (From *Black and Mennonite* by Hubert L. Brown, copyright © 1976 by Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa., pp. 17, 25-26, 28, 30. Used by permission.)

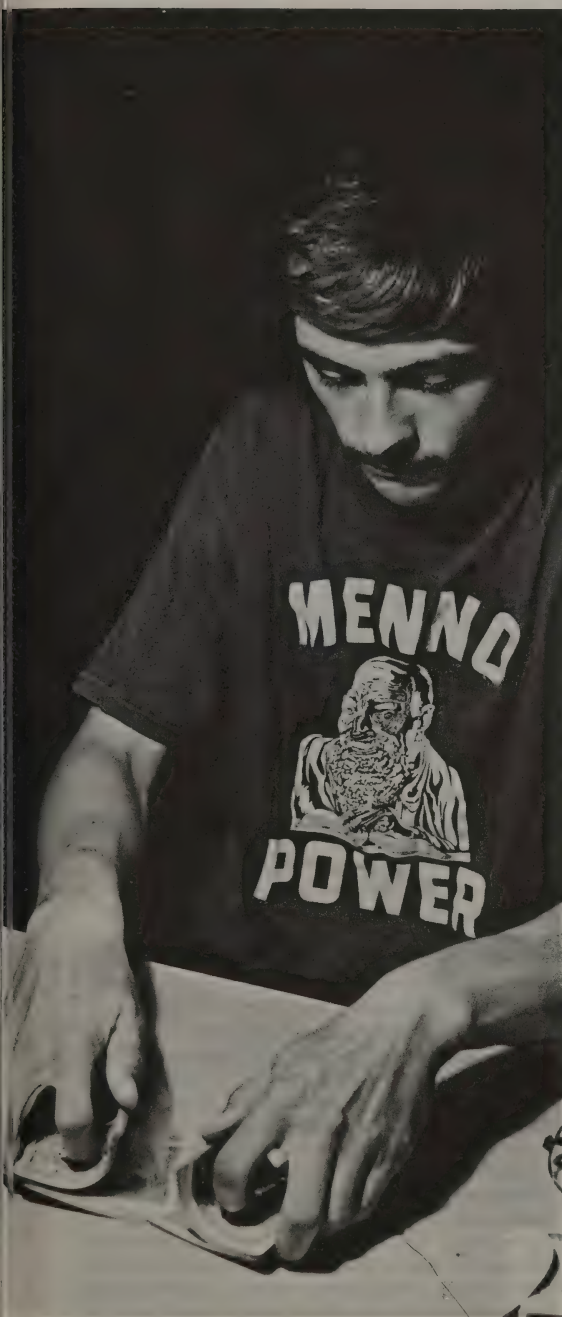
Question for review and discussion:

What are some of the unique problems of identity that black Mennonites must resolve?

North American Native Mennonites

Lawrence Hart, a Mennonite Cheyenne Indian, responded in the following way to the question of what it means for him to be a Mennonite:

If it is not the cultural and ethnic identity which makes one a Mennonite, then what is it?



David Hebert

To be a Mennonite means to be a Christian from an Anabaptist viewpoint. A very basic premise we need to understand, accept, and practice is that anyone of any ethnic background can be a Mennonite.

Is this a revolutionary idea? It could be to some who have grown up with the idea that to be a Mennonite means to speak German, to eat certain foods associated with German people and to be a part of a Germanic community. And yes, it is that. But one can also be an Indian (or Native) and live in an Indian community, eat Indian foods, and speak the native language. And any one of these, German or Native, can be a Mennonite. This is a marvel. This is the marvel of the gospel. The "good news" of Jesus Christ is that there is neither German nor Indian, neither man nor woman, but that we are one. Can one be both Native and Mennonite? For me personally I can be a Mennonite and be as Indian as I want. One can be enriched by being both and thus find tremendous fulfillment in life.

For example, youth often are exposed to the Anabaptist martyrs such as Michael Sattler, Felix Manz, Hans Hut, and Hans Denck. They were great Christians who died for their faith. Indian youth can find parallels in their own tradition, often. I happen to be of the Cheyenne tribe. The Cheyenne had peace chiefs as their leaders. During a very severe conflict period we had peace chiefs who lost their lives violently at the hands of military troops. Names like White Antelope, Lean Bear, and Black Kettle can have as rich a meaning as the Anabaptist martyrs listed above. None of these, and there are others, took up arms to defend themselves.

There are other parallels and similarities between Natives and Mennonites. Mennonites are a minority in a larger Christian tradition; Natives know what it can mean to be a minority. Mennonites have been persecuted and have suffered for it; Natives too have had these experiences. Mennonites have been uprooted and have migrated and resettled in other areas; most Natives have had these experiences. Another and perhaps the greatest similarity is the practice of the peoplehood concept. Mennonites see themselves as a people. Natives too have long held to the peoplehood concept and in fact many Native tribes have named themselves as "the people."

Mennonites around the world

Another dimension of the new face of the Mennonite church is the tremendous growth in the church reported in various parts of the world. The

chart on page 70 gives a summary of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ membership around the world.

1. The Indonesian Mennonite Church

Suhadiweko Djodihardjo has been one of the Mennonite church leaders in Indonesia. He writes the following about the Indonesian Mennonite church:

The first Mennonite missionaries to come to Java were Pieter Jansz and his new bride who were sent from Holland in 1851. Pieter taught school near Djepora in the Muria Mountain region. He used every possible opportunity to tell people about Jesus Christ. After three years he baptized five persons and had the Lord's Supper together with them. It was a slow beginning. "People who believe do not hurry," he used to say. After he knew the language well enough he translated the entire Bible into Japanese.

* * *

The Chinese Mennonites have been here for many years. They became Mennonite Christians without any missionary help. It is an interesting story.

Long ago a man named Tee Siem Tat, who was a Chinese-Indonesian businessman here, became very ill. He sent for a doctor who examined him and said, "Pak Tee, there is nothing wrong with you."

"But I am sick," Pak Tee replied, "I feel terrible."

"I'm sorry," the doctor responded. "Perhaps you should call another doctor who may be able to help you."

He did. First one, and then another. All of them said, "Pak Tee, I find nothing wrong with you."

Meanwhile Pak Tee's wife had found a Bible somewhere and had begun reading it. Every time she came to Mark 15, or other passages which told of Jesus dying on the cross, she began to cry. Finally she and Pak Tee decided to visit the Salvation Army center at Rembang to find out more about the Bible and the Christian life. Pak Tee noticed that he felt much better after the service. Soon he was completely well. They invited the Salvation Army to hold services in their own home, and one day he was converted.

Pak Tee was a very energetic man. He wanted to find out what other Christians believed and so he visited many churches and missionaries. In time, he came to believe that the teaching of missionary Johann Thiessen from Russia was closest to what he thought the Bible said, and he decided to become a Mennonite. Missionary Thiessen baptized him on December 6, 1920,

along with twenty-five others whom he had already won to Christ.

Often the new Christians he won did not know what to do with their idols. They did not have the courage to destroy their former gods on whom they had counted so long and to whom they had prayed. So Pak Tee would offer to take them along home and store them, which he did. By the time he died in 1940, there were several hundred Christians in the church and many idols in Pak Tee's shed. After his death the family burned the idols so they would not be a temptation to anyone to forsake Christ and return to paganism.

The church kept on growing because the members themselves did the witnessing to others. Today the Chinese Mennonite church has over two thousand members. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We work together.

Our churches, too have been growing. . . . Today we have over twenty thousand members and with the children, over thirty thousand. Last year one of our pastors, a woman, baptized over three hundred persons herself. Many villages are asking us to send evangelists to them to teach about Jesus in their schools and churches.

People often ask about the secret of the new strength and joy in our churches. . . . We have no secret; it is simply God at work in the power of the Holy Spirit. I have turned my life over to Him to do with me as He pleases, as have many others in our churches. (From *Twelve Becoming* by C. J. Dyck, copyright © 1972 by Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kans., pp. 119, 125.)

Question for review and discussion:

What are some of the new dimensions that overseas congregations bring to the Mennonite church?

2. The African Mennonite Church

In recent years the Mennonite Church in Africa has also experienced tremendous growth. The following excerpts come from an article written about the African Mennonite churches by Don Jacobs for the Tenth Mennonite World Conference:

The international Mennonite church of today is greatly enriched by the contribution of the energetic, rapidly growing African churches. These churches now constitute almost 15 percent of the total Mennonite family, and they are evangelizing their communities with love and

If the present rate of growth of the Christian church in Central Africa continues, there will be more African Christians than there are White Anglo-Saxon Christians in Europe and North America by the year 2000.



The Mennonite

compassion. The oldest Mennonite congregations in Africa date back to the beginning of our century, but Christianity itself is much, much older on the continent. . . .

While many African churches are poor in physical resources, they are quite rich in spiritual resources. The present challenge is to share gifts in such a way that the entire world body may be built up, both spiritually and materially.

Rapid growth characterizes the African Mennonite churches. Growth exceeds 10 percent a year or an average of twenty baptisms a day. This growth requires the establishment of many new congregations, at least two or three a week, and each congregation should have able leadership. Furthermore each new member should be nurtured. . . .

In the rapidly changing African societies, leadership is therefore constantly under strain. This is true for Mennonites, as well as for other

churches. Leaders are overworked and generally undertrained. They find their assignments very demanding.

In the year 1962, when the Africa Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Fellowship was born, there were Mennonite churches in Rhodesia, Zambia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, but these national churches barely knew one another. It was an eye-opener for them when they discovered that there were large groups of Mennonites in other places on the continent. The formation of the fellowship in that year established a new base for the cooperation of African Mennonites. It meets roughly once each five years but has an Executive Committee which carries forward the interests of the churches. (From the *Mennonite World Handbook*, edited by Paul N. Kraybill, copyright © 1978 by Mennonite World Conference, Lombard, Ill., pp. 35-37. Used by permission.)

MENNONITE AND BRETHREN IN CHRIST WORLD MEMBERSHIP, 1979

Compiled by Paul N. Kraybill, Executive Secretary,
Mennonite World Conference

Continent	Country	Membership	Organized Bodies
AFRICA	Ethiopia	5,000	1
	Ghana	747	1
	Kenya	1,890	1
	Nigeria	4,896	1
	Somalia	100*	1
	Tanzania	10,876	1
	Zaire	63,462	3
	Zambia	3,115	1
	Zimbabwe Rhodesia	3,843	1
	TOTAL	94,000*	11
ASIA	India	35,495	6
	Indonesia	52,738	2
	Japan	2,165	5
	Philippines	1,005	1
	Taiwan	918	1
	Vietnam	150**	1
	TOTAL	92,500	16
AUSTRALIA	Australia	100**	1
	TOTAL	100**	1
CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA	Argentina	1,190	1
	Belize	1,537	3
	Bolivia	5,650**	4
	Brazil	3,644	4
	Colombia	1,324	2
	Costa Rica	416	1
	Dominican Republic	975	1
	Guatemala	320	1
	Honduras	1,200	1
	Jamaica	453	1
	Mexico	13,900**	7
	Nicaragua	428	3
	Panama	700	1
	Paraguay	8,193	9
	Puerto Rico	987	1
	Uruguay	772	3
	TOTAL	42,000*	43
EUROPE	Austria	182	-
	Belgium	100	-
	Federal Republic of Germany	9,930	3
	France	2,200	2
	German Democratic Republic	285	1
	Italy	76	1
	Luxembourg	100*	-
	Netherlands, The	25,589	1

	Switzerland	2,626	1
	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic	55,000*	-
	TOTAL	96,000*	9
NORTH AMERICA	Canada	87,309	7
	United States	227,567	14
	TOTAL	315,000*	21

SUMMARY

Continent	Membership	Countries	Organized Bodies
Africa	94,000	9	11
Asia	92,500	6	16
Australia	100	1	1
Central and South America	42,000	16	43
Europe	96,000	10	9
North America	315,000	2	21
TOTAL	640,000*	44	101

Notes

*Continental totals rounded to nearest 500, except Australia

**Membership estimated

Source: Mennonite World Conference Newsletter, March 1980. Used by permission.

Renewal of the Anabaptist vision

One of the effects of the increase in cultural variety in the Mennonite church has been the reexamination of the theological base of the Anabaptist movement. We have seen how the temptation has been for the Mennonite church to become steeped in tradition and ethnicity. The radical vision of the Anabaptist founders which culminated in a new understanding of the church and a strong emphasis on following Jesus in discipleship has at times been lost in the complacency of wealth and privilege. The desire for the security of tradition and culture has occasionally lessened the commitment to Christ. The gap between the vision and the reality has sometimes been great. New Mennonites have often been quick to see this gap.

The twentieth century has seen a new interest in the theological vision of the early Anabaptists. This upsurge of interest has come from Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike. One of the people who was best able to recaptivate this vision for our time was H. S. Bender. In his now famous statement of the essence of the vision presented in an address to the American Society of Church History in 1943, Bender stressed three aspects of the Anabaptist

vision: the importance of the concept of discipleship, of following Jesus; the church as a community made up of those who voluntarily accept a commitment to Jesus and to each other; and the need for an emphasis on the ethic of love and nonresistance as applied to all human relationships.

Other scholars involved in the rediscovery of this vision have emphasized the radical commitment of the first Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were among those who relied totally on Scripture as a base for life and thought, whatever the consequences.

Many of the people who have taken the Anabaptist vision seriously have asked questions about whether or not the present-day Mennonite church can still be considered Anabaptist. Is the Mennonite church still in the heritage of the Anabaptists? Or has it sold itself to the status quo and to material security? Has the social, economic, and spiritual status of the Mennonite church changed so much that it can do no more than look back nostalgically to the commitment of its forebears? Some Mennonite leaders have argued that we are not only falling short of the Anabaptist vision but that our very way of life rules against us taking it seriously. Hubert Brown has commented that the real Anabaptists of today are the disinherited, radical Christians. He goes on to say that "most present-day Mennonites do not fit these categories, and have drifted away from what it means to be Anabaptist, from what it means to be part of a movement, part of a prophetic, dynamic oppressed minority that listens to God and not society. Hence, today the Mennonites hardly can be called the heirs of Anabaptism. . . . Mennonites have become

acculturated, melted down, average John Q. middle-class Americans with all of society's vices, materialism, and arrogant snobbery!" Mennonites of today, people like Brown argue, are no longer able to identify with the persecuted voluntary suffering minority, but are more often part of the oppressing, affluent majority.

However, we can take hope. The Christ of the gospel that the Anabaptists proclaimed continues to invite us. The faith and commitment of the Anabaptists lives on. Even in the face of strong social and cultural opposition we, like the Anabaptists, can make a radical commitment to be disciples of Jesus. Our Anabaptist forebears call us to take up the cross and follow Jesus. If that happens, the Mennonite/Anabaptist history is not only historical but truly living.

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Questions for review and discussion:

1. What is meant by the "recovery of the Anabaptist vision"?
2. What were the three major emphases of the Anabaptists?
3. How do Mennonites from nonwhite, non-European backgrounds contribute to the rediscovery of the vision?

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Katie Warkentin

